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THE WORKS OF WALTER SCOTT.

VOL. CXIV.

ROBERT L. BRYAN

OF

THE CLARK

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THE CLARK

CLARK



Rosmüller. 1825.

DAVOUST.

THE
WORKS

OF

WALTER SCOTT, Esq.

VOL. CXIV.

LIFE OF NAPOLEON, Vol. 12.

ZWICKAU,
PRINTED FOR BROTHERS SCHUMANN.

1828.

THE
LIFE
OF
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
EMPEROR OF THE FRENCH

WITH
A
PREFATORY VIEW OF THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION

BY THE AUTHOR OF "STAFFORD" &c.

VOL. XI.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR ROBERTS & SON

1838.

THE
L I F E
OF
NAPOLEON BUONAPARTE.

——— *Sed non in Cæsare tantum*
Nomen erat, nec fama ducis; sed nescia virtus
Stare loco: solusque pudor non vincere bello.
Acer et indomitus; quo spes quoque ira vocasset,
Ferre manum, et nunquam temerando parcere ferro:
Successus urgere suos: instare favori
Numinis: impellens quicquid sibi summa petenti
Obstaret: gaudensque viam fecisse ruina.

LUCANI Pharsalia, Lib. I.


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# L I F E

OF

## N A P O L E O N B U O N A P A R T E .

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### C H A P T E R L X X I I I .

*Allies on whose assistance Buonaparte might count. — Causes which alienated from him the Prince Royal of Sweden — who signs a Treaty with Russia. — Delicate situation of the King of Prussia, whose alliance the Emperor Alexander on that account declines. — A Treaty with France dictated to Prussia. — Relations between Austria and France — in order to preserve them, Buonaparte is obliged to come under an engagement not to revolutionize Poland. — His error of policy in neglecting to cultivate the alliance of the Porte. — Amount of Buonaparte's Army. — Levies of the Ban, the Second Ban, and Arriere Ban, for the pro-*



*tection of France in the Emperor's absence. — Storming of Ciudad Roderigo, by Lord Wellington. — Buonaparte makes overtures of Peace to Lord Castlereagh. — The Correspondence broken off. — Ultimatum of Russia rejected, and made the direct cause of Hostilities by Napoleon — who sets out from Paris, 9th May 1812 — and meets the Sovereigns his allies at Dresden, where a variety of Royal Festivities are held. — A last attempt of Napoleon to negotiate with Alexander proves unsuccessful.*

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THE several powers, who might in their different degrees of strength aid or impede the last and most daring of Buonaparte's undertakings, were, — Denmark, Saxony, Sweden, and Prussia, in the north of Europe; in the south, Austria, and the Turkish empire.

Denmark and Saxony were both devoted to the cause of France; but the former power, who had made over to Napoleon her seamen, had no land troops to spare for his assistance. The few that she had on foot were scarce sufficient to protect her against any enterprise of Sweden or England.

Saxony was also the firm friend of Napoleon, who had enlarged her dominions, and changed



her ruler's electoral bonnet into a royal crown. It is true, if Poland was to be regenerated, as seemed to be the natural consequence of a war with Russia, the King of Saxony must have reckoned upon losing his ducal interest in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. But from this he derived little present advantage, and as he was secure of indemnification, the apprehension of that loss did not prevent him from following the banner of Napoleon, with the same good will as ever.

Very different was the condition of Sweden. That kingdom, since the reign of Francis I., had been the ancient and natural ally of France against Russia; in acting against which last power her local advantages afforded great facility. Sweden was also governed at the moment by a Frenchman. But the Prince Royal had received more injuries and affronts, than favours, at the hands of the Emperor Napoleon, and the violent policy which the latter was in the habit of using towards those of his allies and neighbours, who did not submit unresistingly to all his demands, had alienated from France the hearts of the Swedes, and from his own person the friendship of his old companion in arms. We have mentioned the mode of argument, or rather declamation, which he had used to compel the Swedes into a total exclusion of English manufactures,



contrary to a reservation made in a recent treaty, by which the Swedes had retained the right of importing colonial goods and salt, while consenting to exclude British commodities generally. With the same urgency and menaces, he had compelled the Crown Prince to declare war against Britain.

But although Napoleon succeeded in both points, he could not oblige Britain to treat Sweden as a belligerent power. On the contrary, England seemed not in the slightest degree to alter the relations of amity to a state whom she considered as having adopted the attitude of an enemy towards her, merely from compulsion too powerful to be resisted. This moderation on the part of Great Britain, did not prevent Sweden from feeling all the evils of the anti-social system of Buonaparte. Her commerce was reduced to a mere coasting-trade, and her vessels skulked from port to port, exposed to the depredations of Danish and French privateers, who seized upon and confiscated upwards of fifty Swedish ships, under pretence of enforcing the non intercourse system. The Prince Royal applied for redress at the court of Paris; but although vague promises were given, yet neither were the acts of piracy discontinued, nor any amends made for those daily committed. The Baron Alquier, who was the French envoy at Stockholm, used, according



to Bernadotte's expression, the language of a Roman proconsul, without remembering that he did not speak to slaves.

When asked, for example, to state categorically what Napoleon expected from Sweden, and what he proposed to grant her in return, Alquier answered, that «the Emperor expected from Sweden compliance in every point conformable to his system; after which it would be time enough to inquire into what his Imperial Majesty might be disposed to do in favour of Sweden.»

On another occasion, the French envoy had the assurance to decline farther intercourse with the Crown Prince on the subject of his mission, and to desire that some other person might be appointed to communicate with him. There can be no doubt, that, in this singular course of diplomacy, Baron Alquier obeyed his master's instructions, who was determined to treat the Prince Royal of Sweden, emancipated as he was from his allegiance to France by letters patent from the Imperial Chancery, as if he had still been his subject, and serving in his armies. Napoleon went so far as to say, before his courtiers, that he had a mind to make Bernadotte finish his lessons in the Swedish language in the Castle of Vincennes. It is even said, that the Emperor thought seriously of putting this threat into execution, and that a plot was actually formed to



seize the person of the Prince Royal, putting him on board a vessel, and bringing him prisoner to France. But he escaped this danger by the information of an officer named Salazar, formerly an aide-de-camp of Marmont, who conveyed to the Prince timely information of the outrage which was intended. \*)

With so many causes of mutual animosity between France and Sweden, all arising out of the impolitic vehemence by which Buonaparte endeavoured to drive, rather than lead, the Prince Royal into the measures he desired, it can hardly be supposed that the last would neglect any opportunity to assert his independence, and his resolution not to submit to a superiority so degrading in itself, and so ungraciously and even unmercifully exercised.

Such was the state of matters betwixt the two countries, when, from the approaching war with Russia, the assistance of Sweden became essential to France. But what bait could Napoleon hold out to bring back an alienated friend? He might, indeed, offer to assist Bernadotte regaining the province of Finland, which, by the connivance of Napoleon, had been conquered by Russia. But the Crown Prince concluded, that, to enter into

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\*) Appendix, No. VI., p. lxxxii.



a war with the view of recovering Finland, would occasion expenses which the country could not afford, and which the acquisition of Finland could not compensate, even supposing it sure to be accomplished. Besides, the repossession of Finland would engage Sweden in perpetual disputes with Russia, whereas the two nations, separated by the Gulf of Bothnia, had at present no cause of difference. On the other hand, by siding with Russia in the great contest which was impending, Sweden might expect the assistance of that empire, as well as of Britain, to achieve from Denmark, the ally of France, the conquest of her kingdom of Norway, which, in its geographical situation, lay so conveniently for Sweden, and afforded her the whole range of sea-coast along the western shores of Scandinavia. It is said that the Prince Royal offered to Napoleon to enter into a league, offensive and defensive, with France, providing Norway as well as Finland were added to his dominions; but the Emperor rejected the terms with disdain. The whole alleged negotiation, however, has been disputed and denied.

So soon as Buonaparte found there was no hope of conciliating the Prince Royal, which indeed he scarce seems seriously to have attempted, he proceeded, without waiting for the ceremony of declaring war, to strike against Sweden the most severe, or rather the only blow, in his power.



In January 1812, General Davoust marched into Swedish Pomerania, the only possession of Sweden south of the Baltic Sea, seized upon the country and its capital, and proceeded to menace the military occupation of Prussia, so far as that country was not already in the hands of France.

Receiving no satisfaction for this aggression, Sweden, 24th March, 1812, signed a treaty with Russia, declaring war against France, and proposing a diversion, with a joint force of twenty-five or thirty thousand Swedes, together with fifteen or twenty thousand Russians, upon some point of Germany. And the Emperor of Russia became bound, either by negotiation or military co-operation, to unite the kingdom of Norway to that of Sweden, and to hold the Russian army, which was at present in Finland, disposable for that purpose. Thus was the force of Sweden, rendered yet more considerable by the high military character of its present chief, thrown into the scale against France, to whom, but for the passionate and impolitic character of Napoleon's proceeding towards her, she might, in all probability, have remained the same useful and faithful ally which she had been since the alliance of Francis I. with Gustavus Vasa.

No reason can be discovered for insulting Sweden at the precise moment when her co-operation would have been so useful, excepting the ani-



osity of Napoleon against a prince whom he regarded as an ancient rival before the 18th Brumaire, and now as a contumacious and rebellious vassal. A due regard to the honour and interest of France, would have induced him to lay aside such personal considerations. But this does not appear to have been in Buonaparte's nature, who, if he remembered benefits, had also a tenacious recollection of enmities, said to be peculiar to the natives of Corsica. When this feeling obtained the ascendancy, he was too apt to sacrifice his policy to his spleen.

The situation of the King of Prussia, at the breaking out of the dispute between the empires of France and Russia, was truly embarrassing. His position lying betwixt the contending parties, rendered neutrality almost impossible; and if he took up arms, it was a matter of distracting doubt on which side he ought to employ them. Oppressed by French exactions and French garrisons; instigated, besides, by the secret influence of the Tugendbund, the people of Prussia were almost unanimous in their eager wish to seize the sword against France, nor was the King less desirous to redeem the independence, and revenge the sufferings, of his kingdom. The recollections of an amiable and beloved Queen, who had died in the prime of life, heart-broken with the distresses of her country, with her hands locked



in those of her husband, called also for revenge on France, which had insulted her when living, and slandered her when dead.

Accordingly it is now well understood, that the first impulse of the King of Prussia's mind was to throw himself into the arms of Russia, and offer, should it cost him his life and crown, to take share in the war as his faithful ally. But the Emperor Alexander was sensible that, in accepting this offered devotion, he would come under an obligation to protect Prussia in case of those reverses, which might be almost reckoned

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\*) In the *Moniteur*, a scandalous intrigue was repeatedly alluded to as existing between this princess and the Emperor Alexander, and both to Monsieur Las Cases and to others, Buonaparte affirmed the same personally; telling, at the same time, as a good jest, that he himself had kept the King of Prussia out of the way, to provide the lovers a stolen meeting. These averments are so inconsistent with the character universally assigned to this high-spirited and unhappy princess, that we have no hesitation to assign them directly to calumny; a weapon which Napoleon never disdained to wield, whether in private or national controversy.



on as likely to occur in the early part of the campaign. The strongest fortresses in Prussia were in the hands of the French, the army of the King did not amount to more than forty thousand men, and there was no time to arm or organize the national forces. In order to form a junction with these forty thousand men, or as many of them as could be collected, it would be necessary that Alexander should precipitate the war, and march a strong army into Silesia, upon which the Prussians might rally. But such an army, when it had attained its object, must have had in front the whole forces of France, Saxony, and the Confederacy of the Rhine, while the hostile troops of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, with probably a body of Austrian auxiliaries, would have been in their rear. This premature movement in advance, would have resembled the conduct of Austria in the unhappy campaigns of 1805 and 1809; in both of which she precipitated her armies into Bavaria, in hopes of acquiring allies, but only exposed them to the decisive defeats of Ulm and Eckmuhl. It would also have been like the equally ill-omened advance of the Prussian army in 1806, when, hurrying forward to compel Saxony to join him, the Duke of Brunswick gave occasion to the unhappy battle of Jena.

Experience and reflection, therefore, had led



the Russian Emperor and cabinet to be of opinion, that they ought to avoid encountering the French in the early part of the campaign; and, in consequence, that far from advancing to meet them, they should rather suffer the invaders to involve themselves in the immense wastes and forests of the territories of Russia itself, where supplies and provisions were not to be found by the invader, and where every peasant would prove an armed enemy. The support which could be derived from an auxiliary army of Prussians, amounting only to 40,000 men, of whom perhaps the half could not be drawn together, was not, it appeared, an adequate motive for altering the plan of the campaign, which had been founded on the most mature consideration. The Emperor Alexander, therefore, declined accepting of the King of Prussia's alliance, as only tending to bring upon that Prince misfortunes, which Russia had not even the chance of averting, without entirely altering those plans of the campaign which had been deliberately adopted. Foreseeing at the same time that this refusal on his part must have made it necessary for Frederick, whose situation rendered neutrality impossible, to take part with France, the Emperor Alexander generously left him at liberty to take the measures, and form the connexions, which his circumstances rendered inevitable, assuring him, nevertheless,



that if Russia gained the ascendant, Prussia should derive the same advantage from the victory, whatever part she might be compelled to adopt during the struggle.

While the King of Prussia saw his alliance declined by Russia, as rather burdensome than beneficial, he did not find France at all eager to receive him on her part as a brother of the war. He offered his alliance to Buonaparte repeatedly, and especially in the months of March, May, and August 1811; but receiving no satisfaction, he began to be apprehensive that his destruction was intended. There was some reason for this fear, for Napoleon seems to have entertained a personal dislike towards Frederick, and is said to have exclaimed, when he was looking over a map of the Prussian territories. "Is it possible I can have been simple enough to leave that man in possession of so large a kingdom?" There is great reason, besides, to suppose, that Napoleon may have either become acquainted with the secret negotiations betwixt Prussia and Russia, or may have been induced to assume from probability the fact that such had existed. He hesitated, certainly, whether or not he would permit Prussia to remain an independent power.

At length, however, on the 24th of February 1812, a treaty was dictated to Frederick, under condition of subscribing which, the name and



title of King of Prussia were to be yet left him; failing his compliance, Davoust, who had occupied Swedish Pomerania, was to march into Prussia, and treat it as a hostile country. In thus sparing for the time a monarch, of whom he had every reason to be jealous, Napoleon seems to have considered it more advisable to use Frederick's assistance than to throw him into the arms of Russia. The conditions of this lenity were severe; Prussia was to place at the disposal of France about twenty thousand men, with sixty pieces of artillery, the disposable part of the poor remnant of the standing army of the Great Frederick. She was also to supply the French army with everything necessary for their sustenance as they passed through her dominions; but the expense of these supplies was to be imputed as part of the contributions imposed on Prussia by France, and not yet paid. Various other measures were taken to render it easy for the French, in case of necessity, to seize such fortresses belonging to Prussia as were not already in their hands, and to keep the Prussian people as much as possible disarmed, a rising amongst them being considered inevitable, if the French arms should sustain any reverse. Thus, while Russia fortified herself with the assistance of France's old ally Sweden, France advanced against Russia, supported by the remaining army of Frederick of



Prussia, who was at heart Alexander's best well-wisher.

Napoleon had, of course, a weighty voice in the councils of his father-in-law of Austria. But the Austrian cabinet were far from regarding his plans of ambitious aggrandizement with a partial eye. The acute Metternich had been able to discover and report to his master, on his return to Vienna in the spring of 1811, that the marriage which had just been celebrated, would not have the effect of inducing Napoleon to sheathe his sword, or of giving to Europe permanent tranquillity. And now, although on the approach of the hostilities into which they were to be involved by their formidable ally, Austria agreed to supply an auxiliary army of 30,000 men, under Prince Schwartzenberg, it seems probable that she remembered, at the same time, the moderate and lenient mode of carrying on the war practised by Russia, when the ally of Napoleon during the campaign of Wagram, and gave her General secret instructions to be no further active in the campaign than the decent supporting of the part of an auxiliary peremptorily required.

In one most material particular, the necessity of consulting the interests of Austria interfered with Napoleon's readiest and most formidably means of annoying Russia. We have repeatedly



alluded to the re-establishment of Poland as an independent kingdom, as a measure which would have rent from Russia some of the finest provinces which connect her with Europe, and would have gone a certain length in thrusting her back into the character of an Asiatic sovereignty, unconnected with the politics of the civilized world. Such re-construction of Poland was however impossible, so long as Austria continued to hold Polish Galicia; and that state, in her treaty of alliance with France against Russia, made it an express condition, that no attempt should be made for the restoration of Polish independence by Napoleon, without the consent of Austria, or without making compensation to her for being, in the event supposed, deprived of her share of Poland. This compensation, it was stipulated, was to consist in the retrocession, on the part of France, of the Illyrian provinces, yielded up by his Imperial Majesty of Austria at the treaty of Schoenbrun.

By submitting to this embargo on his proceedings in Poland, Napoleon lost all opportunity of revolutionizing that military country, from which he drew therefore little advantage, unless from the Duchy of Warsaw. Nothing but the tenacity with which Buonaparte retained every territory that fell into his power, would have prevented him from at once simplifying this com-



plicated engagement, by assigning to Austria those Illyrian provinces, which were entirely useless to France, but on which her ally set great value, and stipulating in return, — what Austria would then have willingly granted, — the power of disposing, according to his own pleasure, as well of Polish Galicia, as of such parts of the Polish provinces as should be conquered from Russia; or in case, as De Pradt insinuates, the court of Austria were averse to the exchange, it was in the power of Napoleon to have certainly removed their objections, by throwing Venice itself into the scale. But we have good reason to believe that Illyria would have been a sufficient inducement to the transaction.

We cannot suppose Buonaparte blind to the importance of putting, as he expressed it, all Poland on horseback, but whether it was, that in reality he did not desire to establish an independent state upon any terms, or whether he thought it hard to give up the Illyrian provinces, ceded to France in property, in order to reconstruct a kingdom, which, nominally at least, was to be independent; or whether, in fine, he had an idea that, by vague promises and hopes, he could obtain from the Poles all the assistance he desired, — it is certain that he embarrassed himself with this condition in favour of Austria, in a manner which tended to render complex and



difficult all that he afterwards attempted in Polish affairs; and lost the zealous co-operation and assistance of the Lithuanians, at a time when it would have been invaluable to him.

Turkey remains to be noticed as the sole remaining power whom Buonaparte ought in prudence to have propitiated, previous to attacking Russia, of which empire she is the natural enemy, as she was also held the natural and ancient ally of France. Were it not that the talents of Napoleon were much better fitted to crush enemies than to gain or maintain friends, it would be difficult so account for his losing influence over the Porte at this important period. The Turkish government had been rendered hostile to France by the memorable invasion of Egypt; but Sultan Selim, an admirer of Napoleon's valour and genius, had become the friend of the Emperor of France. Selim was cut off by a conspiracy, and his successor was more partial to the English interests. In the treaty of Tilsit, the partition of Turkey was actually agreed upon, though the term was adjourned; \*) as, at the negotia-

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\*) The fact is now pretty generally admitted to have been as stated in the text. But in the public treaty, it appeared that France negotiated an armistice, called that of Slo-



tions of Erfurt, Napoleon agreed to abandon the Turkish dominions as far as the Danube, to become the property of Russia, if it should be in her power to conquer them.

The Court of St Petersburg were ill-advised enough to make the attempt, although they ought to have foreseen, even then, that the increasing power of France should have withheld them from engaging in any scheme of conquest at that period. Indeed their undertaking this war with the Ottoman Empire, a proceeding so impolitic in case of a rupture with France, may be quoted to show the Emperor Alexander's confidence that no such event was likely to take place, and consequently

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bodsea, by which it was stipulated that the two disputed provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia were to be restored to the Turks. But the armistice, as had previously been settled between Napoleon and Alexander, broke up without any such restoration; and a Congress, which was held at Jassy for the arrangement of the quarrel between the Porte and Court of St Peterburg, having been also dissolved without coming to an agreement, the war between the Turks and Russians recommenced upon the Danube.



to prove his own determination to observe good faith towards Napoleon.

The Turks made a far better defence than had been anticipated ; and though the events of war were at first unfavourable to them, yet at length the Grand Vizier obtained a victory before Routschouk, or at least gave the Russian general such a serious check as obliged him to raise the siege of that place. But the gleam of victory on the Turkish banners was of brief duration. They were attacked by the Russians in their entrenched camp, and defeated in a battle so sanguinary that the vanquished army was almost annihilated. The Turks, however, continued to maintain the war, forgotten and neglected as they were by the Emperor of France, whose interest it chiefly was, considering his views against Russia, to have sustained them in their unequal struggle against that formidable power. In the meanwhile, hostilities languished, and negotiations were commenced ; for the Russians were of course desirous, so soon as a war against France became a probable event, to close that with Turkey, which must keep engaged a very considerable army, at a time when all their forces were necessary to oppose the expected attack of Napoleon.

At this period, and so late as the 21st March 1812, it seemed to occur all at once to Buonaparte's recollection, that it would be highly po-



litic to maintain, or rather to renew, his league with a nation, of whom it was at the time most important to secure the confidence. His ambassador was directed to urge the Grand Seignor in person to move towards the Danube, at the head of one hundred thousand men; in consideration of which, the French Emperor proposed not only to obtain possession for them of the two disputed provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia, but also to procure the restoration to the Porte of the Crimea.

This war-breathing message arrived too late; the Porte having adopted a pacific line of policy. The splendid promises of France succeeded too abruptly to so many years of neglect, to obtain credit for sincerity. The envoys of England, with a dexterity which it has not been always their fortune to display, obtained a complete victory in diplomacy over those of France, and were able to impress on the sublime Porte the belief, that though Russia was their natural enemy among European nations, yet a peace of some permanence might be secured with her, under the guarantee of England and Sweden; whereas, if Napoleon should altogether destroy Russia, the Turkish empire, of which he had already meditated the division, would be a measure no state could have influence to prevent, as, in subduing Russia, he would overcome the last terrestrial



barrier to his absolute power. It gives no slight idea of the general terror and suspicion impressed by the very name of Napoleon, that a barbarous people like the Turks, who generally only comprehend so much of politics as lies straight before them, should have been able to understand that there was wisdom in giving peace on reasonable terms to an old and inveterate enemy, rather than, by assisting in his destruction, to contribute to the elevation of a power still more formidable, more ambitious, and less easily opposed. The peace of Bucharest was accordingly negotiated betwixt Russia and Turkey, of which we shall hereafter have occasion to speak.

Thus was France, on the approaching struggle, deprived of her two ancient allies, Sweden and Turkey. Prussia she brought to the field like a slave at her chariot-wheels; Denmark and Saxony in the character of allies, who were favoured so long as they were sufficiently subservient; and Austria, as a more equal confederate, but who had contrived to stipulate, that, in requital of an aid coldly and unwillingly granted, the French Emperor should tie himself down by engagements respecting Poland, which interfered with his using his influence over that country in the manner which would best have served his purposes. The result must lead to one of two conclusions. Either that Napoleon, confident in the



immense preparations of his military force, disdained to enter into negotiations to obtain that assistance which he could not directly command, or else that his talents in politics were inferior to those which he displayed in military affairs.

It is true, that if the numbers, and we may add the quality, of the army which France brought into the field on this momentous occasion, were alone to be considered, Napoleon might be excused for holding cheap the assistance which he might have derived from Sweden or the Porte. He had anticipated the conscription of 1811, and he now called out that of 1812; so that it became plain, that so long as Napoleon lived and warred, the conscription of the first class would be, — not a conditional regulation, to be acted or not acted upon according to occasion, — but a regular and never-to-be-remitted tax of eighty thousand men, annually levied, without distinction, on the youth of France. To the amount of these conscriptions for two years, were to be added the contingents of household kings, vassal princes, subjected republics, — of two-thirds of Europe, in short, which were placed under Buonaparte's command. No such army had taken the field since the reign of Xerxes, supposing the exaggerated accounts of the Persian invasion to be admitted as historical. The head almost turns dizzy as we read the amount of their numbers.



The gross amount of the whole forces of the empire of France, and its dependencies and allies, is thus given by Boutourlin: —

|                                                      |                |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Total amount of the French army,                     | 850,000 men.   |
| The army of Italy, under the Vice-roy Eugene,        | 50,000         |
| ———— of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, with other Poles, | 60,000         |
| ———— of Bavaria,                                     | 40,000         |
| ———— of Saxony,                                      | 30,000         |
| ———— of Westphalia,                                  | 30,000         |
| ———— of Wurtemberg,                                  | 15,000         |
| ———— of Baden,                                       | 9,000          |
| ———— of the Princes of the Confederacy of the Rhine, | 23,000         |
| The corps of Prussian Auxiliaries,                   | 20,000         |
| ———— of Austrian Auxiliaries,                        | 30,000         |
| The army of Naples,                                  | 30,000         |
|                                                      | <hr/>          |
|                                                      | 1,187,000 men. |

But to approximate the actual force, we must deduce from this total of 1,187,000, about 387,000 men, for those in the hospital, absent upon furlough, and for incomplete regiments. Still there remains the appalling balance of eight hundred thousand men, ready to maintain the war; so that Buonaparte was enabled to detach an army to Russia greatly superior to what the



Emperor Alexander could, without immense exertions, get under arms, and this without withdrawing any part of his forces from Spain.

Still, however, in calculating all the chances attending the eventful game on which so much was to be staked, and to encounter such attempts upon France as England might by his absence be tempted to make, Napoleon judged it prudent to have recourse to additional means of national defence, which might extend the duty of military service still more widely among his subjects than was effected even by the conscription. As the measure was never but in one particular brought into general activity, it may be treated of the more slightly. The system consisted in a levy of national guards, divided into three general classes; the Ban, the Second Ban, and Arriere-Ban; for Buonaparte loved to retain the phrases of the old feudal institutions. The First Ban was to contain all men, from twenty to twenty-six years, who had not been called to serve in the army. The Second Ban included all capable of bearing arms, from the age of twenty-six to that of forty. The Arriere-Ban comprehended all ablebodied men from forty to sixty. The levies from these classes were not to be sent beyond the frontiers of France, and were to be called out in succession, as the danger pressed. They were divided into cohorts of eleven hundred



and twenty men each. But it was the essential part of this project that it placed one hundred cohorts of the First Ban, (that is, upwards of one hundred thousand men, between twenty and twenty-six years,) at the immediate disposal of the Minister of War. In short, it was a new form of conscription, with the advantage, to the recruits, of limited service.

The celebrated philosopher Count La Cépède, who, from his researches into natural history, as well as from the ready eloquence with which he could express the acquiescence of the Senate in whatever scheme was proposed by the Emperor, had acquired the title of King of Reptiles, had upon this occasion his usual task of justifying the Imperial measures. In this allotment of another mighty draught of the youth of France to the purposes of military service, at a time when only the unbounded ambition of Napoleon rendered such a measure necessary, he could discover nothing save a new and affecting proof of the Emperor's paternal regard for his subjects. The youths, he said, would be relieved by one-sixth part of a cohort at a time; and, being at an age when ardour of mind is united to strength of body, they would find in the exercise of arms rather salutary sport and agreeable recreation, than painful labour or severe duty. Then the express prohibition to quit the frontiers would



be, their parents might rest assured, an absolute check on the fiery and impetuous character of the French soldier, and prevent the young men from listening to their headlong courage, and rushing forward into distant fields of combat, which no doubt there might be otherwise reason to apprehend. All this sounded very well, but the time was not long ere the Senate removed their writ *ne exeat regno*, in the case of these hundred cohorts; and, whether hurried on by their own impetuous valour, or forced forward by command of their leaders, they were all engaged in foreign service, and marched off to distant and bloody fields, from which few of them had the good fortune to return.

While the question of peace or war was yet trembling in the scales, news arrived from Spain that Lord Wellington had opened the campaign by an enterprise equally successfully conceived and daringly executed. Ciudad Roderigo, which the French had greatly strengthened, was one of the keys of the frontier between Spain and Portugal. Lord Wellington had blockaded it, as we have seen, on the preceding year, but more with the purpose of compelling General Marmont to concentrate his forces for its relief, than with any hope of taking the place. But in the beginning of January 1812, the French heard with surprise and alarm that the English army, sudden-



ly put in motion, had opened trenches before Ciudad Roderigo, and were battering in breach,

Marmont once more put his whole forces in motion, to prevent the fall of a place which was of the greatest consequence to both parties; and he had every reason to hope for success, since Ciudad Roderigo, before its fortifications had been improved by the French, had held out against Massena for more than a month, though his army consisted of 100,000 men. But in the present instance, within ten days from the opening of the siege, the place was carried by storm, almost under the very eyes of the experienced general who was advancing to its relief, and who had no alternative but to retire again to cantonments, and ponder upon the skill and activity which seemed of a sudden to have inspired the British forces.

Lord Wellington was none of those generals who think that an advantage, or a victory gained, is sufficient work for one campaign. The French were hardly reconciled to the loss of Ciudad Roderigo, so extraordinary did it appear to them, when Badajos was invested, a much stronger place, which had stood a siege of thirty-six days against the French in the year 1811, although the defences were then much weaker, and the place commanded by an officer of no talent, and dubious fidelity. It was now, with incomprehensible celerity, battered, breached, stormed, and taken,



within twelve days after the opening of the trenches. Two French Marshals had in vain interfered to prevent this catastrophe. Marmont made an unsuccessful attempt upon Ciudad Rodrigo, and assumed the air of pushing into Portugal; but no sooner did he learn the fall of the place, than he commenced his retreat from Castel-Branco. Soult, who had advanced rapidly to relieve Badajos, was in the act, it is said, of informing a circle of his officers that it was the commands of the Emperor — commands never under any circumstances to be disobeyed — that Badajos should be relieved, when an officer, who had been sent forward to reconnoitre, interrupted the shouts of "*vive l'Empereur!*" with the equally dispiriting and incredible information, that the English colours were flying on the walls.

These two brilliant achievements were not only of great importance by their influence on the events of the campaign, but still more so as they indicated that our military operations had assumed an entirely new character, and that the British soldiers, as now conducted, had not only the advantage of their own strength of body and natural courage, not only the benefit of the resources copiously supplied by the wealthy nation to whom they belonged, but also, as began to be generally allowed, an undoubted superiority in military art and science. The objects of the



campaign were admirably chosen, for the exertion to be made was calculated with a degree of accuracy which dazzled and bewildered the enemy; and though the loss incurred in their attainment was very considerable, yet it was not in proportion to the much greater advantages attained by success.

Badajos fell on the 9th April; and on the 18th of that month, an overture of pacific tendency was made by the French government to that of Britain. It is not unlikely that Buonaparte, on beholding his best commanders completely outgeneralled before Ciudad Roderigo and Badajos, might foresee in this inauspicious commencement the long train of defeat and disaster which befell the French in that campaign of 1812, the events of which could not have failed to give liberty to Spain, had Spain, or rather had her government, been united among themselves, and cordial in supporting their allies.

It might be Lord Wellington's successes, or the lingering anxiety to avoid a war involving so many contingencies as that of Russia; or it might be a desire to impress the French public that he was always disposed towards peace, that induced Napoleon to direct the Duke of Bassano to write a letter to Lord Castlereagh, proposing that the integrity and independence of Spain should be guaranteed under the *present reigning dynasty*;



that Portugal should remain under the rule of the Princes of Braganza; Sicily under that of Ferdinand; and Naples under Murat; each nation, in this manner, retaining possession of that which the other had not been able to wrench from them by force of war. Lord Castlereagh immediately replied, that if the reign of King Joseph were meant by the phrase "the dynasty actually reigning," he must answer explicitly, that England's engagements to Ferdinand VII. and the Cortes presently governing Spain, rendered her acknowledging him impossible.

The correspondence went no farther. The nature of the overture served to show the tenacity of Buonaparte's character, who, in treating for peace, would yield nothing save that which the fate of war had actually placed beyond his reach; and expected the British to yield up to him the very kingdom of Spain, whose fate depended upon the bloody arbitrement of the sword. It also manifested the insincerity with which he could use words to mislead those who treated with him. He had in many instances, some of which we have quoted, laid it down as a sacred principle, that princes of his blood, called to reign over foreign states, should remain still the subjects of France and vassals of its Emperor, whose interest they were bound to prefer on all occasions to that of the countries they were called to govern. Upon



these grounds he had compelled the abdication of King Louis of Holland ; and how was it possible for him to expect to receive credit, when he proposed to render Spain independent under Joseph, whose authority was unable to control even the French Marshals who acted in his name ?

This feeble effort towards a general peace having altogether miscarried, it became subject of consideration, whether the approaching breach betwixt the two great empires could yet be prevented. The most active preparations for war were taking place on both sides. Those of Russia were defensive ; but she mustered great armies on the Niemen, as if in expectation of an assault ; while France was rapidly pouring troops into Prussia, and into the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and assuming those positions most favourable for invading the Russian frontier. Yet amid preparations for war, made on such an immense scale as Europe had never before witnessed, there seemed to be a lingering wish on the part of both Sovereigns, even at this late hour, to avoid the conflict. This indeed might have been easily done, had there been on the part of Napoleon a hearty desire to make peace, instead of what could only be termed a degree of hesitation to commence hostilities. In fact, the original causes of quarrel were already settled, or, what is the same thing, principles had been fixed, on which



their arrangement might be easily adjusted. Yet still the preparations for invading Russia became more and more evident — the purpose was distinctly expressed in the treaty between France and Prussia; and the war did not appear the less certain that the causes of it seemed to be in a great measure abandoned. The anxiety of Alexander was therefore diverted from the source of the dispute, to its important consequences; and he became most naturally more solicitous about having the French troops withdrawn from the frontiers of Poland, than about the cause that originally brought them there.

Accordingly, Prince Kourakin, the Russian plenipotentiary, had orders to communicate to the Duke of Bassano his master's ultimatum. The grounds of arrangement proposed by the Czar were, the evacuation of Prussia and Pomerania by the French troops; a diminution of the garrison of Dantzic; and an amicable arrangement of the dispute between Napoleon and Alexander. On these conditions, which, in fact, were no more than necessary to assure Russia of France's peaceable intentions, the Czar agreed to place his commerce upon a system of licenses as conducted in France; to introduce the clauses necessary to protect the French trade; and farther, to use his influence with the Duke of Oldenburg, to obtain his consent to accept some reasonable indemnifi-



cation for the territory, which had been so summarily annexed to France.

In looking back at this document, it appears to possess as much the character of moderation, and even of deference, as could be expected from the chief of a great empire. His demand that France, unless it were her determined purpose to make war, should withdraw the armies which threatened the Russian frontier, seems no more than common sense or prudence would command. Yet this condition was made by Napoleon, however unreasonably, the direct cause of hostilities.

The person, in a private brawl, who should say to an angry and violent opponent, "Sheathe your sword, or at least lower its point, and I will accommodate with you, on your own terms, the original cause of quarrel," would surely not be considered as having given him any affront, or other cause for instant violence. Yet Buonaparte, in nearly the same situation, resented an unattonable offence, the demand that he should withdraw his armies from a position, where they could have no other purpose save to overawe Russia. The demand, he said, was insolent; he was not accustomed to be addressed in that style, nor to regulate his movements by the commands of a foreign sovereign. The Russian ambassador received his passports; and the unreasonable caprice of Napoleon, which considered an overture towards



an amicable treaty as a gross offence, because it summoned him to desist from his menacing attitude, led to the death of millions, and the irretrievable downfall of the most extraordinary empire which the world had ever seen. On the 9th May 1812, Buonaparte left Paris; the Russian ambassador had his passports for departure two days later.

Upon his former military expeditions, it had been usual for Napoleon to join his army suddenly, and with a slender attendance; but on the present occasion he assumed a style of splendour and dignity becoming one, who might, if any earthly sovereign ever could, have assumed the title of King of Kings. Dresden was appointed as a mutual rendezvous for all the Kings, Dominations, Princes, Dukes, and dependent royalties of every description, who were subordinate to Napoleon, or hoped for good or evil at his hands. The Emperor of Austria, with his Empress, met his mighty son-in-law upon this occasion, and the city was crowded with princes of the most ancient birth, as well as with others who claimed still higher rank, as belonging to the family of Napoleon. The King of Prussia also was present, neither a willing nor a welcome guest, unless so far as his attendance was necessary to swell the victor's triumph. Melancholy in heart and in looks, he wandered through the gay and splendid



scenes, a mourner rather than a reveller. But fate had amends in store, for a prince whose course, in times of unparalleled distress, had been marked by courage and patriotism.

Amidst all these dignitaries, no one interested the public so much as he, for whom, and by whom, the assembly was collected; the wonderful being who could have governed the world, but could not rule his own restless mind. When visible, Napoleon was the principal figure of the group; when absent, every eye was on the door, expecting his entrance. He was chiefly employed in business in his cabinet, while the other crowned personages, (to whom, indeed, he left but little to do,) were wandering abroad in quest of amusement. The feasts and banquets, as well as the assemblies of the royal personages and their suites, after the theatrical representations, were almost all at Napoleon's expense, and were conducted in a style of splendour, which made those attempted by any of the other potentates seem mean and paltry.

The youthful Empress had her share of these days of grandeur. "The reign of Maria Louisa," said her husband, when in Elba, "has been very short, but she had much to make her enjoy it. She had the world at her feet." Her superior magnificence in dress and ornaments, gave her a great preeminence over her mother-in-law, the



Empress of Austria, betwixt whom and Maria Louisa there seems to have existed something of that petty feud, which is apt to divide such relations in private life. To make the Austrian Empress some amends, Buonaparte informs us, that she often visited her daughter-in-law's toilette, and seldom went back without receiving some marks of her munificence. Perhaps we may say of this information, as Napoleon says of something else, that an Emperor should not have known these circumstances, or at least should not have told them. The truth is, Buonaparte did not love the Empress of Austria; and though he represents that high personage as showing him much attention, the dislike was mutual. The daughter of the Duke of Modena had not forgot her father's sufferings by the campaigns of Italy.

In a short time, however, the active spirit of Napoleon led him to tire of a scene, where his vanity might for a time be gratified, but which soon palled on his imagination as empty and frivolous. He sent for De Pradt, the Bishop of Malines, whose talents he desired to employ as ambassador at Warsaw, and in a singular style of diplomacy, thus gave him his commission. "I am about to make a trial of you. You may believe I did not send for you here to say mass, (which ceremony the Bishop had performed that morning). You must keep a great establishment;



have an eye to the women, their influence is essential in that country. You know Poland; you have read Rulhieres. For me, I go to beat the Russians; time is flying; we must have all over by the end of September, perhaps we are even already too late. I am tired to death here; I have been here eight days playing the courtier to the Empress of Austria." He then threw out indistinct hints of compelling Austria to quit her hold on Galicia, and accept an indemnification in Illyria, or otherwise remain without any. As to Prussia, he avowed his intention, when the war was over, to ruin her completely, and to strip her of Silesia. "I am on my way to Moscow," he added. "Two battles there will do the business. I will burn Thoula; the Emperor Alexander will come on his knees, and then is Russia disarmed. All is ready, and only waits my presence. Moscow is the heart of their empire; besides, I make war at the expense of the blood of the Poles. I will leave fifty thousand of my Frenchmen in Poland. I will convert Dantzic into another Gibraltar. I will give fifty millions a-year in subsidies to the Poles. I can afford the expense. Without Russia be included, the Continental System would be mere folly. Spain costs me very dear; without her I should be master of the world; but when I am so, my son will have nothing to do but to keep his place, and it does



not require to be very clever to do that. Go, take your instructions from Maret."

The complete confidence of success implied in these disjointed, yet striking expressions, was general through all who approached Napoleon's person, whether French or foreigners. The young military men looked on the expedition against Russia as on a hunting party which was to last for two months. The army rushed to the fatal country, all alive with the hopes of plunder, pensions, and promotion. All the soldiers who were not included railed against their own bad luck, or the partiality of Napoleon, for detaining them from so triumphant an enterprise.

Meantime, Buonaparte made a last attempt at negotiation, or rather to discover what was the state of the Emperor Alexander's mind, who, while he was himself surrounded by sovereigns, as the sun by planets, remained lonely in his own orbit, collecting around him means of defence, which, immense as they were, seemed scarcely adequate to the awful crisis in which he stood. General Lauriston had been dispatched to Wilna, to communicate definitively with Alexander. Count de Narbonne, already noticed as the most adroit courtier of the Tuileries, was sent to invite the Czar to meet Napoleon at Dresden, in hopes that, in a personal treaty, the two sovereigns might resume their habits of in-



timacy, and settle between themselves what they had been unable to arrange through their ambassadors. But Lauriston could obtain no audience of the Emperor, and the report of Narbonne was decidedly warlike. He found the Russians neither depressed nor elated, but arrived at the general conclusion, that war was become inevitable, and therefore determined to submit to its evils, rather than avoid them by a dishonourable peace.

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## CHAPTER LXXIV.

*Napoleon's Plan of the Campaign against Russia.*

— Understood and provided against by Barclay de Tolly, the Russian Generalissimo. — Statement of the Grand French Army — Of the Grand Russian Army. — Disaster on the river Wilia. — Difficulties of the Campaign, on the part of the French, stated and explained. — Their defective Commissariat and Hospital Department. — Great consequent losses. — Cause of Buonaparte's determination to advance. — His forced marches occasion actual delay. — Napoleon remains for some days at Wilna. — Abbé de Pradt. — His intrigues to excite the Poles. — Neutralized by Napoleon's engagements with Austria. — An attempt to excite Insurrection in Lithuania also fails.

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IN ancient history, we often read of the inhabitants of the northern regions, impelled by want,



and by the desire of exchanging their frozen deserts for the bounties of a more genial climate, breaking forth from their own bleak regions, and, with all the terrors of an avalanche, bursting down upon those of the south. But it was reserved for our generation to behold the invasion reversed, and to see immense hosts of French, Germans, and Italians, leaving their own fruitful, rich, and delightful regions, to carry at once conquest and desolation through the dreary pine forests, swamps, and barren wildernesses of Scythia. The philosopher, Hume, dedicated an Essay to consider, whether futurity might expect a new inundation of barbarian conquerors; a fresh «living cloud of war,” from the northern hives; but neither to him nor any one else had it occurred to anticipate the opposite danger, of combined hundreds of thousands from the most fair and fertile regions of Europe, moving at the command of a single man, for the purpose of bereaving the wildest country of Europe of its national independence. «Russia,” said Buonaparte, in one of his Delphic proclamations, «is dragged on by her fate; her destiny must be accomplished. Let us march; let us cross the Niemen; let us carry war into her territories. The second war of Poland will be as glorious to the French arms as the first; but the peace we shall conclude shall carry with it its



guarantee, and terminate that haughty influence which Russia has exercised for more than fifty years on the affairs of Europe." Napoleon's final object was here spoken out; it was to thrust Russia back upon her Asiatic dominions, and deprive her of her influence in European politics.

The address of the Russian Emperor to his troops was in a different, more manly, rational, and intelligible strain, devoid of those blustering attempts at prophetic eloquence, which are in bad taste when uttered, and, if they may acquire some credit among the vulgar when followed by a successful campaign, become the most bitter of satires, if fortune does not smile on the vaticination. Alexander enforced on his subjects the various efforts which he had made for the preservation of peace, but which had proved fruitless. "It now only remains," he said, "after invoking the Almighty Being who is the witness and defender of the true cause, to oppose our forces to those of the enemy. It is unnecessary to recall to generals, officers, and soldiers, what is expected from their loyalty and courage; the blood of the antient Slavonians circulates in their veins. Soldiers, you fight for your religion, your liberty, and your native land. Your Emperor is amongst you, and God is the enemy of the aggressor."



The sovereigns who addressed their troops, each in his own peculiar mode of exhortation, had their different plans for the campaign. Buonaparte's was formed on his usual system of warfare. It was his primary object to accumulate a great force on the centre of the Russian line, to break it asunder, and cut off effectually as many divisions, as activity could surprise and over-master in such a struggle. To secure the possession of large towns, if possible one of the two capitals, Petersburg or Moscow; and to grant that which he doubted not would by that time be humbly craved, the terms of a peace which should strip Russia of her European influence, and establish a Polish nation in her bosom, composed of provinces rent from her own dominions, — would have crowned the undertaking.

The tactics of Napoleon had, by long practice, been pretty well understood, by those studious of military affairs. Barclay de Tolly, whom Alexander had made his generalissimo, a German by birth, a Scotchman by extraction, had laid down and recommended to the Czar, with whom he was in great favour, a plan of foiling Buonaparte upon his own system. He proposed that the Russians should first show only so much opposition on the frontier of their country, as should lay the invaders under the necessity of



marching with precaution and leisure; that they should omit no means of annoying their communications, and disturbing the base on which they rested, but should carefully avoid everything approaching to a general action. \*) On this principle it was proposed to fall back before the invaders, refusing to engage in any other action than skirmishes, and those upon advantage, until the French lines of communication, extended to an immeasurable length, should become liable to be cut off even by the insurgent peasantry. In the meanwhile, as the French became straitened in provisions, and deprived of recruits and supplies, the Russians were to be reinforcing their army, and at the same time refreshing it. Thus, it was the object of this plan of the campaign not to fight the French forces, until the bad roads, want of provisions, toil-

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\*) The *base* of military operations is, in strategy, understood to mean that space of country which every army marching through a hostile territory must keep open and free in the rear, otherwise his main body must necessarily be deprived of its communications, and probably cut off. The base, therefore, contains the supplies and depots of the army.



some marches, diseases, and loss in skirmishes, should have deprived the invading army of all its original advantages of numbers, spirit, and discipline. This procrastinating system of tactics suited Russia the better, that her preparations for defensive war were very far from being completed, and that it was important to gain time to receive arms and other supplies from England, as well as, by making peace with the Turks; to obtain the disposal of the large army now engaged upon the Danube.

At the same time it was easy to foresee, that so long a retreat, together with the desolation occasioned to the Russian territory by the presence of an invading army, might wear out the patience of the Russian soldiery. Some advantageous position was therefore to be selected, and skilfully fortified before hand, in which a stand might be made, like that of Lord Wellington in the lines at Torres Vedras. For this purpose a very large fortified camp was prepared at Drissa, on the river Düna, or Dwina, which, supposing the object of the French to have been St Petersburg, would have been well calculated to cover that capital. On the other hand, were the French to move on Moscow, which proved their final determination, the entrenchments at Drissa were of no importance.

We must speak of the immense hosts com-



bined under Buonaparte, as if they were all constituent parts of one army, although the theatre of war which they occupied was not less than an hundred and twenty French leagues in extent of front.

Macdonald commanded the left wing of the whole French army, which consisted of above 30,000 men: his orders were to penetrate into Courland, and threaten the right flank of the Russians; and if it were found advisable, to besiege Riga, or at least to threaten that important sea-port. The extreme right of Napoleon's army was placed towards Pinsk, in Volhynia, and consisted almost entirely of the Austrian auxiliaries, under Prince Schwartzenberg. They were opposed to the Russian army under General Tormazoff, which had been destined to protect Volhynia. This was a false step of Napoleon, adopted, doubtless, to allay the irritable jealousy of his ally Austria, on the subject of freeing and restoring the kingdom of Poland. The natives of Volhynia, it must be remembered, are Poles, subjected to the yoke of Russia. Had French troops, or those of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, been sent amongst them, the Volhynians would probably have risen in arms to vindicate their liberty. But they had little temptation to do so when they only saw the Austrians, by whose arms Galicia was yet detained in subjection, and



whose Emperor was as liable as Alexander himself to suffer from the resuscitation of Polish independence.

Betwixt the left wing, commanded by MacDonald, and the right under Schwartzenberg, lay the grand French army, divided into three masses. Buonaparte himself moved with his Guards, of which Bessieres commanded the cavalry, the Mareschals Lefebvre and Mortier the infantry. The Emperor had also under his immediate command the corps d'armée, commanded by Davoust, Oudinot, and Ney; which, with the divisions of cavalry under Grouchy, Montbrun, and Nansouty, amounting, it was computed, to no fewer than two hundred and fifty thousand men, were ready to rush forward and overpower the opposite army of Russians, called the Army of the West. King Jerome of Westphalia, with the divisions of Junot, Poniatowski, and Regnier, and the cavalry of Latour Maubourg, forming a mass of about 80,000 men, were destined in the same manner to move forward on the Russian second, or supporting army. Lastly, a central army, under Eugene, the Viceroy of Italy, had it in charge to press between the first and second Russian army, increase their separation, render their junction impossible, and act against either, or both, as opportunity should arise. Such was the disposition of the invading



force. Murat, King of Naples, well-known by his old name of Le Beau Sabreur, commanded the whole cavalry of this immense army.

On the other hand, the grand Russian army, commanded by the Emperor in person, and more immediately by Barclay de Tolly, advanced its head-quarters as far as Wilna; not that it was their purpose to defend Lithuania, or its capital, but to oblige the French to manœuvre, and to show their intentions. It amounted to one hundred and twenty thousand men. On the north, towards Courland, this grand army communicated with a division of ten thousand men, under Count Essen; and on the south held communication, but on a line rather too much prolonged, with the second army under the gallant Prince Bagration, one of the best and bravest of the Russian generals. Platoff, the celebrated Hettman, or Captain-General of the Cossacks, attended this second army, with twelve thousand of his children of the desert. Independent of these, Bagration's army might amount to eighty thousand men. On the extreme left, and watching the Austrians, from whom perhaps no very vigorous measures were apprehended, was Tormazoff, with what was termed the army of Volhynia, amounting to twenty thousand men. Two armies of reserve were in the course of being



formed at Novogorod and Smolensk. They might amount to about 20,000 men each.

Thus, on the whole, the Russians entered upon the campaign with a sum total of two hundred and sixty thousand men, opposed to four hundred and seventy thousand, or with an odds of almost one half against them. But during the course of the war, Russia raised reinforcements of militia and volunteers to greatly more than the balance which was against her at the commencement.

The grand Imperial army marched upon the river Niemen in its three overwhelming masses; the King of Westphalia upon Grodno, the Viceroy of Italy on Pily, and the Emperor himself on a point called Nagaraiki, three leagues beyond Kowno. When the head of Napoleon's columns reached the river which rolled silently along under cover of immense forests on the Russian side, he advanced in person to reconnoitre the banks, when his horse stumbled and threw him. "A bad omen," said a voice, but whether that of the Emperor or one of his suite, could not be distinguished; "a Roman would return." On the Russian bank appeared only a single Cossack, who challenged the first party of French that crossed the river, and demanded their purpose in the territories of Russia. "To beat you, and to take Wilna," was the reply.



The patrol withdrew, nor was another soldier seen.

A dreadful thunder-storm was the welcome which they received in this wild land; and shortly after the Emperor received intelligence that the Russians were falling back on every side, and manifested an evident intention to evacuate Lithuania without a battle. The Emperor urged forward his columns with even more than his usual promptitude, eager to strike one of those formidable blows by which he was wont to annihilate his enemy at the very commencement of the campaign. This gave rise to an event more ominous than the fall of his horse, or the tempest which received him on the banks of the Niemen. The river Wilia being swollen with rain, and the bridges destroyed, the Emperor, impatient of the obstacle, commanded a body of Polish cavalry to cross by swimming. They did not hesitate to dash into the river. But ere they reached the middle of the stream, the irresistible torrent broke their ranks, and they were swept down and lost almost to a man, before the eyes of Napoleon, to whom some of them in the last struggle turned their faces, exclaiming, "Vive l'Empereur!" The spectators were struck with horror. But much greater would that feeling have been, could they have known that the fate of this handful of brave men



was but an anticipation of that which impended over the hundreds of thousands, who, high in health and hope, were about to rush upon natural and artificial obstacles, no less formidable and no less insurmountable than the torrent which had swept away their unfortunate advanced guard.

While his immense masses were traversing Lithuania, Napoleon fixed his head-quarters at Wilna, the ancient capital of that province, where he began to experience the first pressure of those difficulties which attended his gigantic undertaking. We must pause to detail them; for they tend to show the great mistake of those who have followed Napoleon himself in supposing, that the Russian expedition was a hopeful and well-conceived plan, which would certainly have proved successful, if not unexpectedly disconcerted by the burning of Moscow, and the severity of the weather, by which the French armies were compelled to retreat into Poland.

We have elsewhere mentioned, that, according to Napoleon's usual style of tactics, the French troops set out upon their campaign with bread and biscuit for a few days, and when that was expended, (which, betwixt waste and consumption, usually happened before the calculated pe-



riod,) they lived on such supplies as they could collect in the country, by the means of marauding or pillage, which they had converted into a regular system. But Napoleon had far too much experience and prudence to trust, amid the wastes of Russia, to a system of supplies, which had sufficed for maintenance of the army in the rich fields of Austria. He knew well that he was plunging with half a million of men into inhospitable deserts, where Charles XII. could not find subsistence for twenty thousand Swedes. He was aware, besides, of the impolicy there would be in harassing the Lithuanians by marauding exactions. To conciliate them was a great branch of his plan, for Lithuania, in respect to Russia, was a conquered province, into which Napoleon hoped to inspire the same desire of independence which animated Poland, and thus to find friends and allies among the very subjects of his enemy. The utmost exertion of his splendid talents, putting into activity the utmost extent of his unlimited power, had been, therefore, turned towards collecting immense magazines of provisions, and for securing the means of transporting them along with the army. His strong and impassioned genius was, for months before the expedition, directed to this important object, which he pressed upon his ge-



nerals with the utmost solicitude. "For masses like those we are about to move, if precautions be not taken, the grain of no country can suffice," he said, in one part of his correspondence. — In another, "All the provision-waggon must be loaded with flour, rice, bread, vegetables, and brandy, besides what is necessary for the hospital service. The result of my movements will assemble four hundred thousand men on a single point. There will be nothing to expect from the country, and it will be necessary to have everything within ourselves."

These undeniable views were followed up by preparations, which, abstractedly considered, must be regarded as gigantic. The cars and waggon, which were almost innumerable, destined for the carriage of provisions, were divided into battalions and squadrons. Each battalion of cars was capable of transporting six thousand quintals of flour; each squadron of heavy waggon nearly four thousand eight hundred quintals; besides the immense number dedicated to the service of the engineers and the hospitals, or engaged in transporting besieging material and pontoons.

This sketch must convince the reader, that Napoleon had in his eye, from the outset, the prospect of deficiency in supplying his army with



provisions, and that he had bent his mind to the task of overcoming it by timely preparation. But all his precautions proved totally inadequate. It was found a vain attempt, to introduce military discipline amidst the carters and waggon-drivers; and when wretched roads were encumbered with fallen horses and broken carriages, when the soldiers and wain-drivers began to plunder the contents of the cars and waggons which they were appointed to protect and to manage, the confusion became totally inextricable. Very far from reaching Lithuania, where their presence was so essential, few of the heavy waggons ever attained the banks of the Vistula, and almost none proceeded to the Niemen. Weeks and months after the army had passed, some of the light cars and herds of cattle did arrive, but comparatively few in number, and in most miserable plight. The soldiers were, therefore, at the very commencement of the campaign, compelled to have recourse to their usual mode of supplying themselves, by laying contributions on the country; which, while they continued in Poland, the immense fertility of the soil enabled it to supply. But matters became greatly worse after entering Lithuania, which the Russians had previously endeavoured to strip of all that could benefit the French.

Thus, in the very first march from the Nie-



men and the Wilia, through a country which was regarded as friendly, and before they had seen an enemy, the immense army of Napoleon were incurring great loss themselves, and doing infinite damage to the country on which they lived at free cost, in spite of all the measures which Buonaparte had devised, and all the efforts he had made to maintain them from their own stores.

This uncertain mode of subsistence was common to the whole army, though its consequences were especially disastrous in particular corps. Segur \*) informs us, that the armies under Eugene

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\*) Here and elsewhere we quote, as a work of complete authority, Count Philip de Segur's account of this memorable expedition. The author is, we have always understood, a man of honour, and his work evinces him to be a man of talent. We have had the opinion of several officers of high character, who had themselves served in the campaign, that although unquestionably there may be some errors among the details, and although in some places the author may have given way to the temptation of working up a description, or producing effect by a dialogue, yet his narrative on the whole is



and Davoust were regular in their work of collecting contributions, and distributing them among the soldiers; so that their system of

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candid, fair, and liberal. The unfriendly criticism of General Gourgaud impeaches Count Segur's opportunities of knowing the facts he relates, because his duty did not call him into the line of battle, where he might have seen the military events with his own eyes. We conceive with deference, that, as a historian, Count Segur's situation was more favourable for collecting intelligence than if he had been actually engaged. We speak from high authority in saying, that a battle is in one respect like a ball, — every one recollects the next morning the partner with whom he danced, and what passed betwixt them, but none save a bystander can give a general account of the whole party. Now, Count Segur eminently resembled the bystander in his opportunities of collecting exact information concerning the whole events of the campaign. His duty was to take up and distribute the lodgings at the general head-quarters. It was, therefore, seldom that an officer could go to or return from head-quarters without holding



marauding was less burdensome to the country, and more advantageous to themselves. On the other hand, the Westphalian, and other German

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communication with Count Segur; and, having his plan of a narrative in view, he could not be the man of ability he appears, if he did not obtain from those who arrived at or left head-quarters, such information as they had to communicate. As he had no pressing military duty to perform, he had nothing to prevent his arranging and recording the information he collected; and when General Gourgaud urges the impossibility of the historian's being present at some of the most secret councils, he forgets that many such secrets *percolate* from the cabinet into the better-informed circles around it, even before the seal of secrecy is removed, but especially when, as in the present case, a total change of circumstances renders secrecy no longer necessary. We have only to add, that though the idolatry of Count Segur towards the Emperor is not sufficient to satisfy his critic, he must in other eyes be considered as an admirer of the late Emperor; and that those who knew the French army, will find no reason to suspect him of being a false brother.



auxiliaries, under King Jerome, having learned the lesson of pillaging from the French, and wanting, according to Segur, the elegant manner of their teachers, practised the arts they had acquired with a coarse rapacity, which made the French ashamed of their pupils and imitators. Thus the Lithuanians, terrified, alienated, and disgusted, with the injuries they sustained, were far from listening to the promises of Napoleon, or making common cause with him against Russia, who had governed them kindly, and with considerable respect to their own habits and customs.

But this was not the only evil. The direct loss sustained by the French army was very great. In the course of the very first marches from the Niemen and the Wilia, not less than ten thousand horses, and numbers of men, were left dead on the road. Of the young conscripts especially, many died of hunger and fatigue; and there were instances of some who committed suicide, rather than practise the cruel course of pillage by which only they could subsist; and of others, who took the same desperate step, from remorse at having participated in such cruelties. Thousands turned stragglers, and subsisted by robbery. The Duke of Treviso, who followed the march of the grand army, informed Napoleon, that, from the Niemen to the Wilia, he had



seen nothing but ruined habitations abandoned, carriages overturned, broke open and pillaged, corpses of men and horses, — all the horrible appearances, in short, which present themselves in the route of a defeated army.

Those who desired to flatter Buonaparte, ascribed this loss to the storm of rain, which fell at the time they were entering Lithuania. But summer rain, whatever its violence, does not destroy the horses of an army by hundreds and thousands. That which does destroy them, and renders those that survive almost unfit for service during the campaign, and incapable of bearing the hardships of winter, is hard work, forced marches, want of corn or dry fodder, and the supporting them on the green crop which is growing in the fields. It was now the season when, of all others, a commander, who values the serviceable condition of his army, will avoid such enterprises as require from his cavalry hard work and forced marches. In like manner, storms of summer rain do not destroy the foot soldiers exposed to them, more than other men; but forced marches on bad roads, and through a country unprovided with shelter, and without provisions, must ruin infantry, since every man, who, from fatigue, or from having straggled too far in quest of food, chances to be left behind, is left exposed without shelter to the effects



of the climate, and if he cannot follow and re-join his corps, has no resource but to lie down and die.

The provisions of the hospital department had been as precarious as those of the commissariat. Only six thousand patients could be accommodated in the hospitals at Wilna, which is too small a proportion for an army of 400,000 men, even if lying in quarters in a healthy and peaceful country, where one invalid in fifty is a most restricted allowance; but totally inadequate to the numbers which actually required assistance, as well from the maladies introduced by fatigue and bad diet, as by the casualties of war. Although no battle, and scarce a skirmish had been fought, twenty-five thousand patients encumbered the hospitals of Wilna; and the villages were filled with soldiers who were dying for want of medical assistance. The King of Westphalia must be exempted from this general censure; his army was well provided with hospitals, and lost much fewer men than the others. This imperfection of the hospital department was an original defect in the conception of the expedition, and continued to influence it most unfavourably from beginning to end.

Napoleon sometimes repined under these losses and calamities, sometimes tried to remedy them by threats against marauders, and sometimes en-



deavoured to harden himself against the thought of the distress of his army, as an evil which must be endured, until victory should put an end to it. But repining and anger availed nothing; denunciations against marauders could not reasonably be executed upon men who had no other means of subsistence; and it was impossible to obtain a victory over an enemy who would not risk a battle.

The reader may here put the natural question, Why Buonaparte, when he found the stores, which he considered as essential to the maintenance of his army, had not reached the Vistula, should have passed on, instead of suspending his enterprise until he was provided with those means, which he had all along judged essential to its success? He might in this manner have lost time, but he would have saved his men and horses, and avoided distressing a country which he desired to conciliate. The truth is, that Napoleon had suffered his sound and cooler judgment to be led astray, by strong and ardent desire to finish the war by one brilliant battle and victory. The hope of surprising the Emperor Alexander at Wilna, of defeating his grand army, or at least cutting off some of its principal corps, resembled too much many of his former exploits, not to have captivation for him. For this purpose, and with this expecta-



tion, forced marches were to be undertaken, from the Vistula even to the Dwina and Dnieper; the carts, carriages, cattle, all the supplies brought from France, Italy, and Germany, were left behind, the difficulties of the enterprise forgotten, and nothing thought of but the expectation of finding the enemy at unawares, and totally destroying him at one blow. The fatal consequence of the forced marches we have stated; but what may appear most strange is, that Napoleon, who had recourse to this expeditious and reckless advance, solely to surprise his enemy by an unexpected attack, rather lost than gained that advantage of time, to procure which he had made such sacrifices. This will appear from the following detail: —

The army which had been quartered on the Vistula, broke up from thence about the 1st of June, and advanced in different columns, and by forced marches, upon the Niemen, which it reached upon different points, but chiefly near Kowno, upon the 23d, and commenced the passage on the 24th of the same month. From the Vistula to the Niemen is about 250 wersts, equal to two hundred and thirty-five, or two hundred and forty English miles; from Kowno, on the banks of the Niemen, to Vitepsk, on the Dwina, is nearly the same distance. The whole of it might be marched by an army, moving with



its baggage, in the course of forty marches, at the rate of twelve miles a-day; yet the traversing this distance took, as we shall presently see, four days more, notwithstanding the acceleration of forced marches, than would have been occupied by an army moving at an ordinary and easy rate, and carrying its own supplies along with its columns. The cause why this overhaste should have been attended with actual delay, was partly owing to the great mass of troops which were to be supplied by the principle of the marauding system, partly to the condition of the country, which was doomed to afford them; and partly, it may be, to the political circumstances which detained Napoleon twenty precious days at Wilna. The first reason is too obvious to need illustration, as a flying army of twenty thousand men bears comparatively light on the resources of a country, and may be pushed through it in haste; but those immense columns, whose demands were so unbounded, could neither move rapidly, nor have their wants hastily supplied. But, besides, in a country like Lithuania, the march could not be regular, and it was often necessary to suspend the advance; thus losing in some places the time which great exertion had gained in others. ~~unfrequented~~ and pathless forests were necessarily to be traversed in the utmost haste, as they afforded nothing for the



marauders, on whose success the army depended for support. To make amends for this, it was necessary to halt the troops for one day, or even more, in the richest districts, or in the neighbourhood of large towns, to give leisure and opportunity to recruit their supplies at the expense of the country. Thus the time gained by the forced marches was lost in inevitable delays; and the advance, though attended with such tragic consequences to the soldier, did not secure the advantage which the general proposed to attain.

Upon arriving at Wilna, Napoleon had the mortification to find, that although the Emperor Alexander had not left the place until two days after he had himself crossed the Niemen, yet the Russian retreat had been made with the utmost regularity; all magazines and provisions, which could yield any advantage to the invaders, having been previously destroyed to a very large amount. While Buonaparte's generals had orders to press forward on their traces, the French Emperor himself remained at Wilna, to conduct some political measures, which seemed of the last importance to the events of the campaign.

The Abbé de Pradt had executed with ability the task entrusted to him, of seducing the Poles of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, with the hope of a general restoration of Polish freedom. This brave but unhappy country, destined, it would



seem, to spend its blood in every cause but its own, had, in that portion of it which formerly belonged to Prussia, and now formed the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, gained but little by its nominal independence. This state had only a population of about five millions of inhabitants, yet maintained for the service of France, rather than for its own, an armed force of eighty-five thousand men. Eighteen regiments of these were embodied with the Emperor's army, and paid by France; but the formation and expense of the rest far exceeded the revenues of the Duchy. The last amounted only to forty millions of francs, while the expenses more than doubled that sum. The Grand Duchy had also suffered its full share of distress from the Continental System of Napoleon. The revenue of Poland depends on the sale of the grain which her fertile soil produces; and that grain, in the years previous to the present, had lain rotting in the warehouses. The misery of the poor was extreme; the opulence of the rich classes had disappeared, and they could not relieve them. The year 1811 had been a year of scarcity here as well as elsewhere: and, as in former years the Poles had grain which they could not send to market, so at present they had neither corn nor means to purchase it. To all these disadvantages must be added, the plunder and misery sustained by the Duchy during



the march of Buonaparte's numerous forces from the Vistula to the Niemen.

Yet so highly toned is the national patriotism of the Poles, that it kindled at the name of independence, notwithstanding the various accumulated circumstances which tended to damp the flame. When therefore a diet of the Duchy of Warsaw was convened, where the nobles assembled according to ancient form, all were anxious to meet Napoleon's wishes; but an unfortunate hint which the Emperor had thrown out concerning the length of the discourse with which the Diet was to be opened, induced the worthy Count Mathechewitz, whose duty it was to draw up the peroration, to extend it to fifty pages of very close writing.

As all the assembly exclaimed against the prolixity of this mortal harangue, the French ambassador, the Abbé de Pradt, was required to substitute something more suitable for the occasion. Accordingly, he framed a discourse more brief, more in the taste of his own country, and, we doubt not, more spirited and able than that of Count Mathechewitz. It was hailed by the warm and enthusiastic applause of the Diet. Notwithstanding which, when sent to Napoleon, then at Wilna, he disapproved of it, as too obviously written in the French style of composition, and intimated in plain terms, that lan-



guage like that of an ancient Pole, speaking his national sentiments in the oriental tropes of his national language, would better have suited the occasion.

The intimation of this dissatisfaction tore the veil from the Abbé de Pradt's eyes, as he himself assures us. He foresaw that the infatuated want of judgment which the Emperor displayed in disliking his discourse, was that of a doomed and falling man; he dated from that epoch the overthrow of Napoleon's power, and was so much moved with the spirit of prophecy, that he could not withhold his predictions even before the young persons connected with his embassy.

But a more fatal sign of Napoleon's prospects than could be inferred by any except the author, from his disapprobation of the Abbé de Pradt's discourse, occurred in his answer to the address of the Diet of the Grand Duchy.

The Diet of Warsaw, anticipating, as they supposed, Napoleon's wishes, had declared the whole kingdom, in all its parts, free and independent, as if the partition treaties had never existed; and no just-thinking person will doubt their right to do so. They entered into a general confederation, declared the kingdom of Poland restored, summoned all Poles to quit the service of Russia, and finally, sent deputations to the Grand Duke and the King of Saxony, and another



to Napoleon, announcing their desire to accelerate the political regeneration of Poland, and their hope to be recognised by the entire Polish nation as the centre of a general union. The expressions addressed to Napoleon were in a tone of idolatry. They applied for the countenance of the „Hero who dictated his history to the age, in whom resided the force of Providence,” language which is usually reserved to the Deity alone. „Let the Great Napoleon,” they said, „only pronounce his fiat that the kingdom of Poland should exist, and it will exist accordingly. The natives of Poland will unite themselves at once and un-animously to the service of Him to whom ages are as a moment, and space no more than a point.” In another case, this exaggerated eloquence would have induced some suspicion of sincerity on the part of those who used it; but the Poles, like the Gascons, to whom they have been compared, are fond of superlatives, and of an exalted and enthusiastic tone of language, which, however, they have in all ages been observed to support by their actions in the field.

The answer of Buonaparte to this high-toned address was unexpectedly cold, doubtful, and indecisive. It was at this moment, probably, he felt the pressure of his previous engagements with Austria, which prevented his at once acquiescing in the wishes of the Polish mission.



“He loved the Polish nation,” he said, “and in the situation of the Diet at Warsaw, would act as they did. But he had many interests to reconcile, and many duties to fulfil. Had he reigned when Poland was subjected to those unjust partitions which had deprived her of independence, he would have armed in her behalf, and as matters stood, when he conquered Warsaw and its surrounding territories, he instantly restored them to a state of freedom. . . . He applauded what they had done — authorized their future efforts, and would do all he could to second their resolution. If their efforts were unanimous, they might compel their oppressors to recognise their rights, but these hopes must rest on the exertions of the population.” These uncertain and cool assurances of his general interest in the Polish cause, were followed by the express declaration, “That he had guaranteed to the Emperor of Austria the integrity of his dominions, and he could not sanction any manœuvre, or the least movement, tending to disturb the peaceable possession of what remained to *him* of the Polish provinces. As for the provinces of Poland attached to Russia, he was content with assuring them, that providing they were animated by the spirit evinced in the Grand Duchy, Providence would crown their good cause with success.”



This answer, so different from that which the Poles had expected, struck the mission with doubt and dismay. Instead of countenancing the re-union of Poland, Napoleon had given an assurance, that, in the case of Galicia, he neither could nor would interfere to detach that province from Austria; and in that of the Polish provinces attached to Russia, he exhorted the natives to be unanimous, in which case, instead of assuring them of his powerful assistance, he was content with recommending them to the care of that Providence, in whose place the terms of their bombastic address had appeared to install Napoleon himself. The Poles accordingly began from that period to distrust the intentions of Napoleon towards the re-establishment of their independence, the more so, as they observed that neither Polish nor French troops were employed in Volhynia or elsewhere, whose presence might have given countenance to their efforts, but Austrians only, who, for example's sake, were as unwilling to encourage the Russian provinces of Poland to declare for the cause of independence, as they would have been to preach the same doctrines in those which belonged to Austria.

Napoleon afterwards often and bitterly regretted the sacrifice which he made on this occasion to the wishes of Austria; and he had the more



occasion for this regret, as the error seemed to be gratuitous. It is true, that to have pressed Austria on the subject of emancipating Polish Galicia, might have had the effect of throwing her into the arms of Russia; but this might probably have been avoided by the cession of the Illyrian provinces as an indemnity. And, if this exchange could not be rendered acceptable to Austria, by throwing in Trieste, or even Venice, Napoleon ought then to have admitted the impossibility of reinstating the independence of Poland, to have operated as a reason for entirely declining the fatal war with Russia.

The French ruler miscarried also in an effort to excite an insurrection in Lithuania, although he named a provisional government in the province, and declared the country was free of the Russian yoke. But the Lithuanians, a colder people than the Poles, were not in general much dissatisfied with the government of Russia, while the conduct of the French armies in their territories alienated their minds from Napoleon. They observed also the evasive answer which he returned to the Poles, and concluded, that if the French Emperor should have occasion to make peace with Alexander, he would not hesitate to do so at the expense of those whom he was now encouraging to rise in insurrection. Thus the moral effect which Napoleon expected



to produce on the Russian frontier, was entirely checked and counteracted; insomuch, that of a guard of honour, which the Lithuanians had proposed to serve for the Emperor's person, only three troopers ever made their appearance on parade. Nor did the country at large take any steps, either generally or individually, to intimate a national interest in the events of the war, seeming to refer themselves entirely to the course of events.

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## CHAPTER LXXV.

*Proceedings of the Army under Prince Bagration. — Napoleon's manœuvres against him. — King Jerome of Westphalia is disgraced for alleged inactivity. — Bagration is defeated by Davoust, but succeeds in gaining the interior of Russia, and re-establishing his communication with the Grand Army — which retreats to Drissa. — Barclay and Bagration meet at Smolensk on the 20th July. — The French Generals become anxious that Napoleon should close the Campaign at Witepsk for the season. — He persists in proceeding. — Manœuvres of both Armies in regard to Smolensk. — It is evacuated by De Tolly, after setting fire to the place. — Reduced condition of the French, and growing strength of the Russian Armies. — Peace effected between Russia, and England, Sweden, and Turkey. — Napoleon resolves to advance upon Moscow.*

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**N**APOLÉON continued to occupy his head-quarters at Wilna, from 28th June to 16th July, the space of eighteen days. It was not usual with him to make such long halts; but Wilna was his last point of communication with Europe, and he had probably much to arrange ere he could plunge into the forests and deserts of Russia, whence all external intercourse must be partial and precarious. He named Maret Duke of Bassano, Governor of Lithuania, and placed under the management of that minister the whole charge of correspondence with Paris and with the armies; thus rendering him the centre of administrative, political, and even military communication between the Emperor and his dominions.

It must not be supposed, however, that these eighteen days passed without military movements of high importance. The reader must remember that the grand army of Russia was divided into two unequal portions. That commanded under the Emperor by Barclay de Tolly, had occupied Wilna and the vicinity, until the French entered Lithuania, when, by a preconcerted and well-executed retreat, they fell back on their strong fortified camp at Drissa. The smaller army, under Prince Bagration, was much farther ad-



vanced to the south-westward, and continued to occupy a part of Poland. The Prince's headquarters were at Wolkowisk; Platoff, with seven thousand Cossacks, lay at Grodno, and both he and Bagration maintained communication with the main army through its left wing, which, under Dorokhoff, extended as far as Lida. The army of Bagration had been posted thus far to the south-west, in order that when Napoleon crossed the Niemen, this army might be placed in his rear as he advanced to Wilna. To execute this plan became impossible, so much greater was the invading army than the Russians had anticipated. On the contrary, the French were able to protect the flank of their advance against Wilna by an army of 30,000 men, under the King of Westphalia, placed betwixt them and this secondary Russian army. And far from having it in his power to annoy the enemy, Bagration was placed so much in advance as greatly to hazard being separated from the main body, and entirely cut off. The Russian Prince accordingly had directions from Barclay de Tolly to get his army out of their perilous situation; and again, on the 13th of July, he had orders from Alexander to move on the camp of Drissa.

When Napoleon arrived at Wilna, the danger of Bagration became imminent; for the en-



trenched camp at Drissa was the rendezvous of all the Russian corps, and Napoleon being 150 wersts, or seven days' march, nearer to Drissa than Bagration, neither Napoleon nor any other general had ever so fair an opportunity of carrying into execution the French Emperor's favourite manœuvre, of dividing into two the line of his enemy, which was unquestionably too much extended.

It was the 30th of July ere Napoleon was certain of the advantage which he possessed, and he hastened to improve it. He had dispatched the greater part of his cavalry under Murat, to press on the retreat of the grand Russian army; the second corps under Oudinot, and the third under Ney, with three divisions of the first corps, were pushed towards the Dwina on the same service, and constituted a force too strong for the army of Barclay de Tolly to oppose. On the right of the army, the King of Westphalia had directions to press upon Bagration in front, and throw him upon the army of Davoust, which was to advance on his flank and towards his rear. It was concluded, that Bagration, cut off from the grand army, and attacked at once by Jerome and Davoust, must necessarily surrender or be destroyed.

Having thus detached very superior forces



against the only two Russian armies which were opposed to him, Buonaparte himself, with the Guards, the army of Italy, the Bavarian army, and three divisions of Davoust's corps d'armée, was at liberty to have marched forward upon Witepsk, occupying the interval between the corps of Murat, who pressed upon Alexander and de Tolly, and of Davoust, who was pursuing Bagration. By thus pressing on where there was no hostile force opposed to him, Napoleon might have penetrated between the two Russian armies, to each of whom a superior force was opposed, might have forced himself between them and occupied Witepsk, and threatened both St Petersburg and Moscow; or, if he decided for the latter capital, might have advanced as far as Smolensk. That Buonaparte formed this plan of the campaign on the 10th of July at Wilna, we are assured by Segur; but it was then too late for putting it in execution — yet another week was lost at Wilna. All seem to have been sensible of an unusual slowness in Napoleon's motions on this important occasion; and Segur attributes it to a premature decay of constitution, of which, however, we see no traces in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814. But the terrible disorder of an army, the sick and stragglers of which absolutely filled Lithuania, and that



army one of such immense size, required considerable time to remodel and new-organize it; and this of itself, a misfortune inherent in the enterprise, is sufficient to account for the halt at Wilna.

Meantime Bagration, in a precarious situation, defended himself with the greatest skill and gallantry. Being cut off from the direct road to Drissa, it was his object to retreat eastward to his rear, instead of moving northward by his right flank, and thus to make his way towards the Dwina either through Ostrowno and Minsk, or by the town of Borizoff. When he gained the Dwina, Bagration trusted to form a junction with the grand army, from which he was now so fearfully separated. The actual strength of his army was, however, increased not only by the Hetmann Platoff with his Cossacks, who, being advanced south-westward as far as Grodno, made in fact a part of Bagration's command, and assisted him materially in his retreat; but also by the division of General Dorokhof, which, forming the extreme left of the grand Russian army, was cut off in the retreat upon Drissa by the advance of the French, and therefore had been placed also in communication with Bagration. So that, numerically, the Prince might have under his command from forty to fifty thousand men.



The ground which Bagration had to traverse, was the high plain of Lithuania, where arise the sources of the rivers which take different directions to the Black and Baltic Seas. The soil is unusually marshy, and traversed by long causeways, which the Russians made use of in defending themselves against the attacks of Jerome's advanced guard. But while Bagration struggled against the attempt on his front, Davoust, having occupied all the posts on the Russian's right flank, and succeeded in preventing him taking the shortest road to Drissa, began next to cut him off from his more circuitous route to the east, occupying the town of Minsk, and the defiles by which Bagration must issue from Lithuania towards Witepsk and the Dwina. The occupation of Minsk greatly embarrassed the retreat of Bagration; insomuch, that the French were of opinion that it was only the want of skill and enterprise on the part of King Jerome of Westphalia, who did not, it was said, press the Russians with sufficient vigour, that prevented the Russian Prince being thrust back on Davoust, and totally destroyed. At any rate, Jerome, whether guilty or not of the alleged slowness of movement, was, according to the fashion in which the chief of the Napoleon dynasty treated the independent princes whom he



called to sovereignty, sent back in disgrace to his Westphalian dominions, unaccompanied even by a soldier of his guards, for all of whom Napoleon had sufficient employment.

Several skirmishes were fought between the corps of Bagration, and those opposed to it, of which the event was dubious. Platoff and his Cossacks had more than one distinguished success over the Polish cavalry, who, with all their fiery courage, had not yet the intimate acquaintance with partisan war, which seems to be a natural attribute of the modern Scythians. In the meanwhile, Bagration, continuing his attempts at extricating his army, made another circuitous march towards the south, and, avoiding his pursuers, he effected the passage of the Beresina at Bobruisk. The Dnieper (anciently the Borysthenes) was the next obstacle to be overcome, and with a view to regain the ground he had lost, Bagration ascended that stream as far as Mohiloff. Here he found himself again anticipated by Davoust, who was equally, though less unpleasantly surprised, by finding himself in front of Bagration, who prepared to clear his way by the sword. The combat was at first advantageous to the Russians, but they were at length repulsed roughly, and lost the battle; without, however, suffering much, except in the



failure of their purpose. Disappointed in this attempt, Bagration, with unabated activity, once more altered his line of retreat, descended the Dnieper so far as to reach Nevoi-Bikoff, finally crossed at that point, and thus gained the interior of Russia, and an opportunity of again placing himself in communication with the grand Russian army, from which he had been so nearly cut off.

It was certainly a new event in the history of Napoleon's wars, that two large armies of French should be baffled and outmanœuvred by a foreign general. And yet this was clearly the case; for, admitting that the Russians committed originally the great error of extending their line too far from Drissa, the intended point of union, and although, in consequence, the army of Bagration ran great risk of being cut off, yet the manœuvres by which he effectually eluded the enemy, showed superior military talent on the part of the general, as well as excellent discipline on that of the soldiers, and were sufficient for the extrication of both.

We return to the grand army, commanded by the Emperor, or rather by Barclay de Tolly, which, though pressed by Murat, at the head of the greater part of the French cavalry, as well as by Oudinot and Ney, all burning for combat,



made a regular and successful retreat to the entrenched camp at Drissa, where the Russian army had been appointed to concentrate itself. The French troops, on their part, approached the left bank of the Dwina, and that river now separated the hostile armies, and there took place only partial actions between detached corps with various success. But the Russian general Witgenstein, whose name began to be distinguished both for enterprise and conduct, observing that Sebastiani's vanguard of French cavalry had quartered themselves with little precaution in the town of Drissa, he passed the river unexpectedly on the night of the 2d July, beat up Sebastiani's quarters, and was completely successful in the skirmish which ensued. Enterprises of this sort show a firm and energetic character, and Napoleon began already to be aware of the nature of the task he had before him, and of the necessity of employing his own talents in the campaign.

In the meantime, Barclay was led to change his plan, from learning the danger to which Prince Bagration was exposed. The camp at Drissa became too distant a point of junction, and there was every risk that the whole body of the French army, which was now getting itself into motion, would force a passage across the Dwina at Witepsk, a good deal higher up than



Drissa, and thus at once turn Barclay's left flank, and entirely separate him from Bagration and his corps d'armée. Alarmed at this prospect, Barclay evacuated the camp, and began to ascend the right side of the Dwina, by Polotsk, towards Witepsk. This line of movement converged with that of Bagration's retreat, and served essentially to favour the desired junction of the two Russian armies. Witgenstein was left near Drissa to observe the enemy, and cover the road to St Petersburg. The army first arrived at Polotsk, when the Emperor Alexander left the troops and hastened to Moscow, to recommend and enforce energetic measures, and solicit the heavy sacrifices which the emergency demanded. Barclay continued his march upon Witepsk, hoping to get into communication with Bagration, to whom he had sent orders, directing him to descend the Dnieper as far as Orcha, (or Orcha,) which is about fifty-six weists from Witepsk.

At this period, Napoleon was directing his whole reserved forces upon the same point of Witepsk, with a purpose as anxious to prevent the junction of the two Russian armies, as that of Barclay to accomplish that important movement. Had Napoleon's march commenced earlier, there can be no doubt that he must have attained the disputed position sooner by marching



from Wilna, than Barclay could have reached it by ascending the Dwina from Drissa. Hasting from Wilna upon the 4th, he might easily have reached Witepsk on the 20th, and would then have found himself, with a chosen army of 120,000 men, without an enemy on his front, posted between the two hostile armies, each of which was pressed by a force superior to their own, and having their flanks and communications at his mercy. Instead of this advantageous condition, the Emperor found himself in front of the grand army of Russia, in a situation where they could not easily be brought to action, although severe and bloody skirmishes took place between the cavalry on both sides.

On his part, Barclay was far from easy. He heard nothing of Bagration, whom he expected to approach from Orca; and rather than abandon him to his fate by a retreat, he formed, on the 14th July, the almost desperate resolution of risking a general action with very superior forces, commanded by Napoleon. But just as he had made his dispositions for battle, the Russian general received news from one of the Prince's aides-de-camp, which made him joyfully alter his determination. The repulse at Mohiloff had, as before noticed, obliged Bagration to change his line of retreat, which was now di-



rected upon Smolensk. Barclay, renouncing instantly his purpose of battle, commenced a retreat upon the same point, and arriving at Smolensk on the 20th, was joined by Bagration within two days after. The result of these manœuvres had been on the whole disappointing to the Emperor of the French. The two armies of Russians had united without material loss, and placed themselves upon their own lines of communication. No battle had been fought and won; and although Napoleon obtained possession of the fortified camp at Drissa, and afterwards of Witepsk, it was only as positions which it no longer served the enemy's purpose to retain.

The marshals and generals who surrounded Napoleon began to wish and hope that he would close at Witepsk the campaign of the season, and, quartering his troops on the Dwina, await supplies, and the influence of the invasion upon the mind of the Russian nation, till next spring. But this suggestion Buonaparte treated with contempt, asking those who favoured such a sentiment, whether they thought he had come so far only to conquer a parcel of wretched huts. If ever, therefore, he had seriously thought of settling his winter-quarters at Witepsk, which Segur affirms, and Gourgand positively denies, it had been but a passing purpose. Indeed, his



pride must have revolted at the very idea of fortifying himself with entrenchments and redoubts in the middle of summer, and confessing his weakness to Europe, by stopping short in the midst of a campaign, in which he had lost one-third of the active part of his great army, without even having fought a general action, far less won a decisive victory.

Meanwhile the Russians, finding their two wings united, to the number of 120,000, were not inclined to remain inactive. The French army at Witepsk lay considerably more dispersed than their own, and their plan was, by moving suddenly upon Napoleon, to surprise him ere his army could be concentrated. With this view, General Barclay directed the march of a great part of the grand army upon Rudneia, a place about half-way between Witepsk and Smolensk, being nearly the centre of the French line of position. Their march commenced on the 26th July; but on the next day, Barclay received information from the out-posts, which induced him to conclude that Napoleon was strengthening his left flank for the purpose of turning the Russian right wing, and assaulting the town of Smolensk in their rear. To prevent this misfortune, Barclay suspended his march in front, and began by a flank movement to extend his



right wing, for the purpose of covering Smolensk. This error, for such it was, led to his advanced guard, who had not been informed of the change of plan, being placed in some danger at Inkowo, a place about two wersts from Rudneia. Platoff, however, had the advantage in the cavalry skirmish which took place. The Russian general, in consequence of the extension of his flank, discovered that there was no French force on the left, and consequently, that he was in no danger on that point; and he resumed his original plan of pressing the French at Rudneia. But while Barclay lost four days in these fruitless marches and countermarches, he at length learned, that the most speedy retreat towards Smolensk would be necessary to save him from that disaster which he had truly apprehended, though he mistook the quarter from which the danger was to come.

While Barclay was in hopes of surprising Napoleon, the Emperor had laid a scheme of a singularly audacious character, for inflicting the surprise with which he had been himself threatened. Without allowing his purpose to be suspended by the skirmishing on his front, he resolved entirely to change his line of operations from Witepsk upon the Dwina, to concentrate his army on the Dnieper, making Orcsa the



central point of his operations, and thus, turning the left of the Russians instead of their right, as Barclay had apprehended, he hoped to gain the rear of their forces, occupy Smolensk, and act upon their lines of communication with Moscow. With this purpose Napoleon withdrew his forces from Witepsk, and the line of the Dwina, with equal skill and rapidity, and, by throwing four bridges over the Dnieper, effected a passage for Ney, the Viceroy, and Davoust. The King of Naples accompanied them, at the head of two large corps of cavalry. Poniatowski, with Junot, advanced by different routes to support the movement. Ney and Murat, who commanded the vanguard, drove everything before them until they approached Krasnoi, upon 14th August, where a remarkable action took place. This manœuvre, which transferred the Emperor's line of operations from the Dwina to the Dnieper, has been much admired by French and Russian tacticians, but it has not escaped military criticism. \*)

General Newerowskoi had been stationed at Krasnoi with above six thousand men, a part of the garrison of Smolensk, which had been sent

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\*) See Appendix to this volume, No. I.



out for the purpose of making a strong reconnaissance. But finding himself attacked by a body of infantry stronger than his own, and no less than eighteen thousand cavalry besides, the Russian general commenced his retreat upon the road to Smolensk. The ground through which the road lay was open, flat, and favourable for the action of cavalry. Murat, who led the pursuit, and, while he affected the dress and appearance of a cavalier of romance, had the fiery courage necessary to support the character, sent some of his light squadrons to menace the front of the Russian corps, while with his heavy horse he annoyed their flanks or thundered upon their rear. To add to the difficulties of the Russians, their columns consisted of raw troops, who had never been under fire, and who might have been expected to shrink from the furious onset of the cavalry. They behaved bravely, however, and availed themselves of a double row of trees, which borders the high road to Smolensk on each side, to make their musketry effectual, and to screen themselves from the repeated charges. Protecting themselves as they retreated by a heavy fire, Newerowskoi made good a lion-like retreat into Smolensk, having lost four hundred men, chiefly by the artillery, and five guns, but receiving from friend and foe the testimony



due to a movement so bravely and ably conducted.

Upon the 14th of August, the same day with this skirmish, Napoleon arrived at Rasassina, upon the Dnieper, and continued during the 15th to press forward towards Smolensk, in the rear of Ney and Murat. Prince Bagration, in the meantime, threw General Raefskoi into Smolensk, with a strong division, to reinforce Newerowskoi, and advanced himself to the Dnieper, along the left bank of which he pressed with all possible speed towards the endangered town. Barclay de Tolly was now made aware, as we have already stated, that while he was engaged in false manœuvres to the right, his left had been in fact turned, and that Smolensk was in the utmost danger. Thus the two Russian generals pressed forward from different points to the relief of the city, whilst Napoleon used every effort to carry the place before their arrival.

Smolensk, a town of consequence in the empire, and, like Moscow, honoured by the appellation of the Sacred, and of the Key of Russia, contains about 12,600 inhabitants. It is situated on the heights of the left bank of the Dnieper, and was then surrounded by fortifications of the ancient Gothic character. An old wall, in some places dilapidated, was defended



by about thirty towers, which seemed to flank the battlements; and there was an ill-contrived work, called the Royal Bastion, which served as a species of citadel. The walls, however, being eighteen feet thick, and twenty-five high, and there being a ditch of some depth, the town, though not defensible if regularly approached, might be held out against a *coup-de-main*. The greatest inconvenience arose from the suburbs of the place, which, approaching near to the wall of the town, preserved the assailants from the fire of the besieged, as they approached it. Raefskoi prepared to defend Smolensk at the head of about sixteen thousand men. He was reinforced on the 16th of August by a division of grenadiers under Prince Charles of Mecklenberg, who were detached for that purpose by Bagration.

Ney arrived first under the walls of the city, and instantly rushed forward to attack the citadel. He failed entirely, being himself wounded, and two-thirds of the storming party cut off. A second attempt was made to as little purpose, and at length he was forced to confine his efforts to a cannonade, which was returned from the place with equal spirit. Later in the day, the troops of Napoleon appeared advancing from the eastward on one side of the Dnieper, while al-



most at the same moment there were seen upon the opposite bank clouds of dust enveloping long columns of men, moving from different points with uncommon celerity. This was the grand army of Russia under Barclay, and the troops of Bagration, who, breathless with haste and anxiety, were pressing forward to the relief of Smolensk.

“At length,” said Napoleon, as he gazed on the advance from the opposite side, “at length I have them!” He had no doubt it was the purpose of the Russians to pass through the city, and, deploying from its gates, to offer him under the walls that general action for which he longed, and on which so much depended. He took all the necessary measures for preparing his line of battle.

But the cautious Barclay de Tolly was determined, that not even for the protection of the sacred city would he endanger the safety of his army, so indispensably necessary to the defence of the empire. He dismissed to Ellnia his more impatient coadjutor, Prince Bagration, who would willingly have fought a battle, incensed as he was at beholding the cities of Russia sacked, and her fields laid waste, without the satisfaction either of resistance or revenge. Barclay in the meanwhile occupied Smolensk, but only for the



purpose of covering the flight of the inhabitants, and emptying the magazines.

Buonaparte's last look that evening, was on the still empty fields betwixt his army and Smolensk. There was no sign of any advance from its gates, and Murat prophesied that the Russians had no purpose of fighting. Davoust entertained a different opinion; and Napoleon, continuing to believe what he most wished, expected with the peep of day to see the whole Russian army drawn up betwixt his own front and the walls of Smolensk. Morning came, however, and the space in which he expected to see the enemy was vacant as before. On the other hand, the high road on the opposite side of the Dnieper was filled with troops and artillery, which showed that the grand army of the Russians was in full retreat. Disappointed and incensed, Napoleon appointed instant measures to be taken to storm the place, resolving as speedily as possible to possess himself of the town, that he might have the use of its bridge in crossing to the other side of the Dnieper, in order to pursue the fugitive Russians. There are moments when men of ordinary capacity may advise the wisest. Murat remarked to Buonaparte, that as the Russians had retired, Smolensk, left to its fate, would fall without the loss that must be sustained



in an attack by storm, and he more than hinted the imprudence of penetrating farther into Russia at this late season of the year. The answer of Napoleon must have been almost insulting; for Murat, having exclaimed that a march to Moscow would be the destruction of the army, spurred his horse like a desperate man to the banks of the river, where the Russian guns from the opposite side were cannonading a French battery, placed himself under a tremendous fire, as if he had been courting death, and was with difficulty forced from the dangerous spot.

Meantime the attack commenced on Smolensk, but the place was defended with the same vigour as on the day before. The field guns were found unable to penetrate the walls; and the French lost four or five thousand men in returning repeatedly to the attack. But this successful defence did not alter Barclay's resolution of evacuating the place. It might no doubt have been defended for several days more, but the Russian general feared that a protracted resistance on this advanced point might give Napoleon time to secure the road to Moscow, and drive the Russian armies back upon the barren and exhausted provinces of the north-west, besides getting betwixt them and the ancient capital of Russia. In the middle of the night, then, while the



French were throwing some shells into the place, they saw fires beginning to kindle, far faster and more generally than their bombardment could have occasioned. They were the work of the Russian troops, who, having completed their task of carrying off or destroying the magazines, and having covered the flight of the inhabitants, had now set the dreadful example of destroying their own town, rather than that its houses or walls should afford assistance to the enemy.

When the Frenchmen entered Smolensk, which they did the next morning, 18th August, most of the town, which consisted chiefly of wooden houses, was yet blazing — elsewhere they found nothing but blood and ashes. The French troops were struck with horror at the inveterate animosity of the Russians, and the desperation of the resistance which they met with; and all began to wish a period to a war, where there was nothing to be gained from the retreating enemy, except a long vista of advance through an inhospitable wilderness of swamps, pine-forests, and deserts; without provisions, and without shelter; without hospitals for the sick, and dressings for the wounded; and without even a shed where the weary might repose, or the wounded might die.

Buonaparte himself hesitated, and is reported



to have then spoken of concluding the campaign at Smolensk, which would, he said, be an admirable head of cantonments. "Here," he said, "the troops might rest and receive reinforcements. Enough was done for the campaign. Poland was conquered, which seemed a sufficient result for one year. The next year they would have peace, or they would seek it at Moscow." But in the interior of his councils, he held a different language, and endeavoured to cover, with the language of prudence, the pride and pertinacity of character, which forbade him to stop short in an enterprise which had yet produced him no harvest of renown. He stated to his generals the exhausted state of the country, in which his soldiers were living from hand to mouth; and the risk and difficulty of drawing his supplies from Dantzic or Poland, through Russian roads, and in the winter season. He alleged the disorganized state of the army, which might move on, though it was incapable of stopping. "Motion," he said, "might keep it together; a halt or a retreat would be at once to dissolve it. It was an army of attack, not of defence; an army of operation, not of position. The result was, they must advance on Moscow, possess themselves of the capital, and there dictate a peace."



The language which Segur has placed in the mouth of the Emperor, by no means exaggerates the dreadful condition of the French army. When Napoleon entered the country, only six weeks before, the corps which formed his operating army amounted to two hundred and ninety-seven thousand men; and by the 5th August, when preparing to break up from Witepsk, that number was diminished to one hundred and eighty-five thousand, not two-thirds of their original number, and a great additional loss had been sustained in the movements and encounters on the Dnieper. The wounded of the army were in the most miserable state, and it was in vain that the surgeons tore up their own linen for dressings; they were obliged to use parchment, and the down that grows on the birch trees: it is no wonder that few recovered.

Thus it may be concluded, that this rash enterprise carried with it, from the beginning, the seeds of destruction, which, even without the conflagration of Moscow, or the Russian climate, though the latter must have been at all events included, made the expedition resemble that of Cambyzes into Egypt; of Crassus, and after him Julian, into Parthia; and so many others of the same character, where the extent of preparation



only rendered the subsequent fate of the invaders more signally calamitous.

While the French army was thus suffering a gradual or rather hasty decay, that of the Russians was now receiving rapid reinforcements. The Emperor Alexander, on leaving the army for Moscow, had convoked the nobles and the merchants of that capital in their several assemblies, had pledged to them his purpose never to make peace while a Frenchman remained in Russia, and had received the most enthusiastic assurances from both ranks of the state, of their being devoted to his cause with life and property. A large sum was voted by the merchants as a general tax; besides which, they opened a voluntary subscription, which produced great supplies. The nobility offered a levy of ten men in the hundred through all their estates; many were at the sole expense of fitting out and arming their recruits, and some of these wealthy boyards furnished companies, nay battalions, entirely at their own expense. The word peace was not mentioned, or only thought of as that which could not be concluded with an invader, without an indelible disgrace to Russia.

Other external circumstances occurred, which greatly added to the effect of these patriotic exertions.



A peace with England, and the restoration of commerce, was the instant consequence of war with France. Russia had all the support which British diplomacy could afford her, in operating a reconciliation with Sweden, and a peace with Turkey. The former being accomplished, under the mediation of England, and the Crown Prince being assured in possession of Norway, the Russian army under General Steigenteil, or Steingel, which was, while Bernadotte's amicable disposition might be doubted, necessarily detained in Finland, was now set at liberty, for the more pressing service of defending the empire.

A peace, even still more important, was made with the Turks at Bucharest, on the 16th May. The Porte yielded up to Russia, Bessarabia, and that part of Moldavia situated on the left of the river Pruth, and Russia renounced all claim to the rest of the two provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia. But the great advantage which accrued to Russia by this treaty, was its setting at liberty a veteran army of forty-five thousand men, and rendering them a disposable force in the rear of the French troops.

If the able statesman, who at that period conducted the foreign affairs of Great Britain, \*)

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\*) Lord Castlereagh.



had never rendered to his own country and to the world, any other service than the influence which he successfully exercised in these important diplomatic affairs, he must have gone down to posterity as the minister, who had foreseen and provided, in the most critical moment, the mode of strengthening Russia to combat with her formidable invaders, and which, after all her exertions, was the means of turning the balance in her favour.

It was at Witepsk that Napoleon learned that the Turks had made peace; and as it had only instigated him to precipitate his measures against Smolensk, so now the same reason urged him to continue his march on Moscow. Hitherto his wings had had the advantage of the enemy. Macdonald, in blockading Riga, kept all Courland at his disposal, and alarmed St Petersburg. More to the south, Saint Cyr had some hard fighting with Wittgenstein, and after a severe battle at Polotsk, had reduced that enterprising officer to the defensive.

Equally favourable intelligence had reached from Volhynia, the extreme right of the terrible line of invasion. The Russian General Tormasoff had made, when least expected, his appearance in the Grand Duchy, driven before him Regnier, who was covering that part of Poland, destroyed



a Saxon brigade, and alarmed Warsaw. But Regnier united himself with the Austrian general, Schwartzenberg, advanced on Tormasoff, and engaging him near a place called Gorodeczna, defeated him with loss, and compelled him to retreat. It was obvious, however, that the advantage of these two victories at Polotsk and Gorodeczna would be entirely lost, if General Steingel, with the Finland army, should join Wittgenstein, while Tormasoff fell back on the Moldavian army of Russia, commanded by Admiral Tchitchagoff.

For Napoleon to await in cantonments at Smolensk, in a wasted country, the consequences of these junctions, which were likely to include the destruction of his two wings, would have been a desperate resolution. It seemed waiting for the fate which he had been wont to command. To move forward was a bold measure. But the French army, in its state of disorganization, somewhat resembled an intoxicated person, who possesses the power to run, though he is unable to support himself if he stand still. If Napoleon could yet strike a gallant blow at the Russian grand army; if he could yet obtain possession of Moscow the Holy, he reckoned on sending dismay into the heart of Alexander, and dictating to the Czar, as he had done to many



other princes, the conditions of peace from within the walls of his own palace. Buonaparte, therefore, resolved to advance upon Moscow. And perhaps, circumstanced as he was, he had no safer course, unless he had abandoned his whole undertaking, and fallen back upon Poland; which would have been an acknowledgment of defeat that we can hardly conceive his stooping to, while he was yet at the head of an army.

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## CHAPTER LXXVI.

*Napoleon detaches Murat and other Generals in pursuit of the Russians. — Bloody, but indecisive Action, at Valoutina. — Barclay de Tolly's defensive system relinquished, and Koutousoff appointed to the chief command of the Russian Army. — Napoleon advances from Smolensk. — Battle of Borodino fought, on 5th September. — Victory remains with the French, but without affording them any essential service. — Prince Bagration among the slain. — Koutousoff retreats upon Mojaïsk, and thence upon Moscow. — Napoleon continues his advance on the 12th. — Count Rostopchin, Governor of Moscow — His Character. — The Russians abandon Moscow, which is evacuated by the Inhabitants, after the removal of the Archives and Public Treasures, and the emptying of the Magazines. — On the 14th September, the Grand Russian Army*



*marches through Moscow. — Last public Court of Justice held there by Rostopchin, after which he follows the march of the Army.*

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WITHOUT communicating his purpose of advancing in person from Smolensk, and completing, without any interval of delay, his great undertaking, Napoleon failed not to detach Murat, Ney, Junot, and Davoust, in pursuit of the Russians, as they retired from Smolensk. Either, however, his own mind was not made up, or he did not wish his purpose of going onward to be known. He represented this demonstration as arising merely out of the desire of pressing the Russian retreat, though in fact it was preliminary to his own advance.

Barclay de Tolly having performed the stern duty of burning Smolensk, had retired for two or three miles along the road to St Petersburg, which route he chose in order to avoid a cannonade from the left side of the Dnieper. Having proceeded a little way in this direction, he turned southward to regain the road to Moscow, which he would have taken at first, but for its exposing him to loss from the enemy's artillery, where it bordered on the river. The French could not for some time determine on which route they



were to pursue the Russians. At length, finding the track, they overtook the rear-guard at a place called Valoutina, encumbered as it was with guns and baggage. Here a desperate action took place, the Russians reinforcing their rear-guard as fast as the French brought new bodies to attack them. Both parties fought most obstinately, and the distinguished French general Gudin was mortally wounded. The French blamed Junot, who, having been dispatched across the Dnieper, showed no alertness in advancing to charge the enemy. There was seen, indeed, in this affair of Valoutina, or Lombino, that the marshals and the great officers who had been accustomed each to command a separate corps d'armée, disdained to receive either orders, or even advice or hints, from a brother of the same rank. Wherever there were two or three of these dignitaries on the field, it was necessary Buonaparte should be within reach, to issue the necessary orders; for no voice save that of the Emperor was implicitly obeyed by all.

In the meantime, the bloody action of Valoutina had an unsatisfactory result. The Russians, whose rear-guard had been attacked, had moved off without losing either guns, prisoners, or baggage. They had lost equal numbers with the French, but the time was fast approaching when



they must possess a numerical superiority, and when, of course, an equal loss would tell in favour of the party which was nearest to its resources.

The plan of Barclay de Tolly had hitherto been scrupulously adhered to. All general actions had been cautiously avoided; and while no means were left unemployed to weaken the enemy in partial actions, and to draw him on from swamp to swamp, from conflagration to conflagration, from one wild and waste scene to another of equal sterility and disconsolation, the end had been in a great measure attained, of undermining the force and breaking the moral courage of the invading army, who wandered forward like men in a dream, feeling on all hands a sense of oppressive and stifling opposition, yet unable to encounter anything substantial which the slumberer can struggle with and overcome. Barclay de Tolly, if he had made some faults by extending his line too much at the commencement of the campaign, and afterwards by his false movements upon Rudneia, had more than atoned for these errors by the dexterity with which he had manœuvred before Smolensk, and the advantages which he had gained over the enemy on various other occasions. But they were now approaching Moscow the Grand, the Sanctified, and the mili-



tary councils of Russia were about to change their character.

The spirit of the Russians, especially of the new levies, was more and more exasperated at the retreat, which seemed to have no end; and at the style of defence, which seemed only to consist in inflicting on the country, by the hands of Cossacks or Tartars, the very desolation which was perhaps the worst evil they could experience from the French. The natural zeal of the new levies, their confidence and their desire to be led to fight in the cause for which they were enlisted, eagerly declared against further retreat; and they demanded a halt, and a battle under a Russian general, more interested, as they supposed such must be, in the defence of the country, than a German stranger. The Emperor almost alone continued to adhere to the opinion of Barclay de Tolly. But he could not bid defiance to the united voice of his people and his military council. The political causes which demanded a great battle in defence of Moscow, were strong and numerous, and overcame the military reasons which certainly recommended that a risk so tremendous should not be incurred.

In compliance, therefore, with the necessity of the case, the Emperor sacrificed his own opi-



nion. General Koutousoff, an officer high in military esteem among the Russians, was sent for from the corps which had been employed on the Danube against the Turks, to take the chief command of the grand army; and it was to Barclay's great honour, that, thus superseded, he continued to serve with the utmost zeal and good faith in a subordinate situation.

The French were not long of learning that their enemy's system of war was to be changed, and that the new Russian general was to give them battle, the object which they had so long panted for. Buonaparte, who had halted six days at Smolensk, moved from thence on the 24th August, and now pressed forward to join the advanced guard of his army at Gjatz. In this place his followers found a Frenchman who had dwelt long in Russia. They learned from this man the promotion of Koutousoff to the chief command of the army opposed to them, and that he was placed there for the express purpose of giving battle to the French army. The news were confirmed by the manner of a Russian officer, who arrived under some pretext with a flag of truce, but probably to espy the state of the invader's army. There was defiance in the look of this man; and when he was asked by a French general what they would



find between Wiazma and Moscow, he answered sternly, "Pultawa." There was, therefore, no doubt, that battle was approaching.

But the confusion of Buonaparte's troops was still such, that he was obliged to halt two days at Gjaty, in order to collect and repose his army. He arrived at the destined field of battle, an elevated plain, called Borodino, which the Russians had secured with lines and batteries.

The French army were opposed to them on the 5th September, having consumed seventeen days in marching two hundred and eighty wersts. Their first operation was a successful attack upon a redoubt in the Russian front, but which — a great error in war — was situated too distant from it to be effectually supported. The French gained it and kept it. The armies lay in presence of each other all the next day, preparing for the approaching contest. Upon a position naturally strong, the Russians had raised very formidable field-works. Their right flank rested on a wood, which was covered by some detached entrenchments. A brook, occupying in its course a deep ravine, covered the front of the right wing, and the centre of the position as far as the river of Borodino; from that village the left extended down to another village, called Semoneskoie, which is more open, yet protected



by ravines and thickets in front. This, as the most accessible point, was anxiously secured by redoubts and batteries; and in the centre of the position, upon a gentle elevation, arose a sort of double battery, like a citadel, for the protection of the whole line.

In this strong position was stationed the Russian army, equal now in numbers to the French, as each army might be about 120,000 men. They were commanded by a veteran, slow, cautious, tenacious of his purpose, wily, too, as Napoleon afterwards found to his cost, but perhaps not otherwise eminent as a military leader. The army he led were of one nation and language, all conscious that this battle had been granted to their own ardent wishes, and determined to make good the eagerness with which they had called for it.

The French army, again, consisted of various nations; but they were the *elite*, and seasoned soldiers who had survived the distresses of a most calamitous march; they were the veterans of the victors of Europe; they were headed by Napoleon in person, and under his immediate command by those Marshals, whose names in arms were only inferior to his own. Besides a consciousness of their superiority in action, of



which, from the manner in which they had covered themselves in entrenchments, the enemy seemed aware, the French had before them the prospect of utter destruction, if they should sustain a defeat in a country so difficult that they could hardly advance even as a successful army, and certainly could never hope to retreat as a routed one. Buonaparte's address to his troops had less of the tinsel of oratory than he generally used on such occasions. "Soldiers," he said, "here is the battle you have longed for; it is necessary, for it brings us plenty, good winter quarters, and a safe return to France. Behave yourselves so that posterity may say of each of you, 'He was in that great battle under the walls of Moscow.'"

In the Russian camp was a scene of a different kind, calculated to awaken feelings to which France had long ceased to appeal. The Greek clergy showed themselves to the troops, arrayed in their rich vestments, and displaying for general worship the images of their holiest Saints. They told their countrymen of the wrongs which had been offered by the invaders to earth as well as Heaven, and exhorted them to merit a place in paradise by their behaviour in that day's battle. The Russians answered with shouts.



Two deeply interesting circumstances occurred to Napoleon the day before the battle. An officer brought him a portrait of his boy, the King of Rome, which he displayed on the outside of the tent, not only to satisfy the officers, but the soldiers, who crowded to look upon the son of their Emperor. The other was the arrival of an officer from Spain with dispatches, giving Napoleon news of the loss of the battle of Salamanca. He bore the evil tidings with temper and firmness, and soon turned his thoughts alike from domestic enjoyments and foreign defeats, to forming the necessary plans for the action before him.

Davoust proposed a plan for turning the left of the enemy's entrenched line, by following the old road from Smolensk to Moscow, and placing 35,000 men in the flank and rear of that part of the Russian position. This operation was partly to be accomplished by a night march, partly on the morning, while the rest of the army was engaging the enemy's attention in front. The ground to which this road would have conducted Davoust and his troops, forms the highest land in the neighbourhood, as appears from the rivulets taking their source there. Upon this commanding position the attacking corps might have been formed in the rear of the



Russian line. Such a movement on that point must have cut off the Russians from their point of retreat on Mojaisk and Moscow, and Davoust might have come down their line, driving everything before him, advancing from redoubt, to redoubt, and dispersing reserve after reserve, till the Russians should no longer have the semblance of an army. Perhaps Napoleon considered this plan as too hazardous, as it implied a great weakening of his front line, which, in that case, might have been attacked and broken before the corps d'armée under Davoust had attained the desired position.

The Emperor therefore determined that Poniatowski, with not more than five thousand men, should make a demonstration, that should commence upon their left, in the direction proposed by Davoust, and that then a general attack should commence on the Russian right and centre. Foreseeing an obstinate resistance, he had ordered as much artillery as possible to be brought into line, and the guns on each side are said to have amounted to a thousand. The battle began about seven o'clock, by Ney's attacking the bastioned redoubt on the Russian centre, with the greatest violence, while Prince Eugene made equal efforts to dislodge the enemy from the village of Semoneskoie, and the adjoining



fortifications. No action was ever more keenly debated, nor at such a wasteful expenditure of human life. The fury of the French onset at length carried the redoubts, but the Russians rallied under the very line of their enemy's fire, and advanced again to the combat, to recover their entrenchments. Regiments of peasants, who till that day had never seen war, and who still had no other uniform than their grey jackets, formed with the steadiness of veterans, crossed their brows, and having uttered their national exclamation, — "*Gospodee pomiloui nas!* — God have mercy upon us!" — rushed into the thickest of the battle, where the survivors, without feeling fear or astonishment, closed their ranks over their comrades as they fell, while, supported at once by enthusiasm for their cause, and by a religious sense of predestination, life and death seemed alike indifferent to them.

The fate of the day seemed more than once so critical, that Napoleon was strongly urged on more than one occasion, to bring up the Young Guard, whom he had in reserve, as the last means of deciding the contest. He was censured by some of those around him for not having done so; and it has been imputed to illness, as he had passed a bad night, and seemed unusually languid during the whole of the day. But the



secret of his refusal seems to be contained in his reply to Berthier when he urged him on the subject. «And if there is another battle to-morrow, where is my army?» The fact is, that this body of ten thousand household troops were his last reserve. They had been spared as far as possible in the march, and had, of course, retained their discipline in a proportional degree; and had they sustained any considerable loss, which, from the obstinate resistance and repeated efforts of the Russians, was to be apprehended, Buonaparte, whom even victory must leave in a perilous condition, would in that case have lost the only corps upon whom, in the general disorganization of his army, he could thoroughly depend. The compromising the last reserve is an expedient reluctantly resorted to by prudent generals; and perhaps, if Napoleon had been as circumspect on that subject at Waterloo as at Borodino, his retreat from that bloody field might have been less calamitous than it proved.

The Russians, whose desperate efforts to recover their line of redoubts had exposed them to so much loss, were at length commanded to retreat; and although the victory was certainly with the French, yet their enemies might be said rather to desist from fighting, than to have



suffered a defeat. Indeed, it was the French who, after the battle, drew off to their original ground, and left the Russians in possession of the bloody field of battle, where they buried their dead, and carried off their wounded, at their leisure. Their cavalry even alarmed the French camp on the very night of their victory.

Both parties sustained a dreadful loss in this sanguinary battle. Among that of the Russians, the death of the gallant Prince Bagration, whose admirable retreat from Poland we have had occasion to commemorate, was generally lamented. Genaral Touczkoff also died of his wounds; and many other Russians generals were wounded. Their loss amounted to the awful sum total of fifteen thousand men killed, and more than thirty thousand wounded. The French were supposed to have at least ten thousand men killed, and double the number wounded. Of these last few recovered, for the great convent of Kolotskoi, which served them as an hospital, was very ill provided with anything for their relief; and the medical attendants could not procure a party to scour the neighbouring villages, to obtain lint and other necessaries, — for it seems even the necessaries of an hospital could, in this ill-fated army, only be collected by marauding.



Eight French generals were slain, of whom Monbrun and Caulaincourt, brother of the Grand Equerry, were men of distinguished reputation, About thirty other generals were wounded. Neither party could make any boast of military trophies, for the Russians made a thousand prisoners, and the French scarce twice the number; and Koutousoff carried away ten pieces of cannon belonging to the French, leaving in their hands thirteen guns of his own. So slight, except in the numbers of slain, had been the consequences of the battle, that it might have seemed to have been fought, as in the games of chivalry, merely to ascertain which party had the superior strength and courage.

According to the Russian accounts, Koutousoff entertained thoughts of giving battle again the next day; but the reports from various corps having made him acquainted with the very large loss they had sustained, he deemed the army too much exhausted to incur such a risk. He retreated the next day upon Mojaïsk, without leaving behind him a single fragment to indicate that he had the day before sustained such an immense loss. Upon the 9th September, the French arrived at Mojaïsk, and came again in sight of the Russian rear-guard, and made dispositions to attack them. But on the 11th, they



found that the Russian army had again disappeared, by a retreat so well conducted, and so effectually masked and concealed, as to leave Napoleon altogether uncertain whether they had taken the road to Moscow, or to Kalouga. Owing to this uncertainty, Napoleon was obliged to remain at Mojaisk till the 12th, when he received positive intelligence that the Russian army had retreated upon their capital.

It is impossible to avoid observing, how often the Russian army, though large, and consisting of new levies, had, in the course of this campaign, escaped from the front of the French, and left Napoleon at a loss to conjecture whither they had gone. Besides the present occasion, the same circumstance took place at Witepsk, and again before the walls of Moscow. No doubt the Russians were in their own country, and possessed clouds of Cossacks, by means of whom they might cover the retreat of their main body; yet with all these advantages we are led to admire the natural spirit of obedience, and instinct of discipline, by which they were brought to execute that movement with such steadiness, that not a single straggler remained to betray their secret.

On the 12th September, Buonaparte resumed



his march, the army having no better guide than the direction of the high road, and the men no better food than horse-flesh and bruised wheat. Upon the previous day, Murat and Mortier, who led the van-guard, found the Russians strongly posted near Krymskoie, where the inconsiderate valour of the King of Naples brought on an action, in which the French lost two thousand men. Still Buonaparte pursued the traces of the Russians, because he could not suppose it possible that they would resign their capital without a second struggle. He was the more anxious to meet it, as two divisions of the Italian army, under Laborde and Pino, had joined him from Smolensk, which again carried his numbers, sore thinned after the battle of Borodino, to upwards of one hundred thousand men.

A council of war, of the Russian generals, had been called, to deliberate on the awful question, whether they should expose the only army which they had in the centre of Russia, to the consequences of a too probable defeat, or whether they should abandon without a struggle, and as a prey to the spoiler, the holy Moscow — the Jerusalem of Russia — the city beloved of God and dear to man, with the name and existence of which so many historical, pa-



triotic, national, and individual feelings were now involved. Reason spoke one language, pride and affection held another.

To hazard a second battle, was in a great measure to place the fate of their grand army upon the issue; and this was too perilous an adventure even for the protection of the capital. The consideration seems to have prevailed, that Napoleon being now in the centre of Russia, with an army daily diminishing, and the hard season coming on, every hour during which a decisive action could be delayed was a loss to France, and an advantage to Russia. This was the rather the case, that Wittgenstein, on the northern frontier, being reinforced by Steingel with the army of Finland; and, on the south, that of Moldavia being united to Tormasoff, — Lithuania, and Poland, which formed the base of Napoleon's operations, were in hazard of being occupied by the Russians from both flanks, an event which must endanger his supplies, magazines, reserves, and communications of every kind, and put in peril at once his person and his army. Besides, the Russian generals reflected, that by evacuating Moscow, a measure which the inhabitants could more easily accomplish than those of any other city in the civilized world, they would diminish the prize to the victor, and leave him nothing



to triumph over save the senseless buildings. It was, therefore, determined, that the preservation of the army was more essential to Russia than the defence of Moscow, and it was agreed that the ancient capital of the Czars should be abandoned to its fate.

Count Rostopchin, the governor of Moscow, was a man of worth and talent, of wit also, as we have been informed, joined to a certain eccentricity. He had, since the commencement of the war, kept up the spirits of the citizens with favourable reports and loyal declarations, qualified to infuse security into the public mind. After the fate of Smolensk, however, and especially after the recommencement of Buonaparte's march eastward, many of the wealthy inhabitants of Moscow removed or concealed their most valuable effects, and left the city themselves. Rostopchin continued, however, his assurances, and took various means to convince the people that there was no danger. Among other contrivances, he engaged a great number of females in the task of constructing a very large balloon, from which he was to shower down fire, as the people believed, upon the French army. Under this pretext, he is stated to have collected a large quantity of fire-works and combustibles, actually destined for a very different purpose.



As time passed on, however, the inhabitants became more and more alarmed, and forming a dreadful idea of the French, and of the horrors which would attend their entrance into the city, not only the nobility, gentry, and those of the learned professions, but tradesmen, mechanics, and the lower orders in general, left Moscow by thousands, while the Governor, though keeping up the language of defiance, did all he could to superintend and encourage the emigration. The archives and the public treasures were removed; the magazines, particularly those of provisions, were emptied, as far as time permitted; and the roads, especially to the south, were crowded with files of carriages, and long columns of men, women, and children on foot, singing the hymns of their church, and often turning their eyes back to the magnificent city, which was so soon destined to be a pile of ruins.

The Grand Army of Moscow arrived in the position of Fili, near the capital; not, it was now acknowledged, to defend the sacred city, but to traverse its devoted streets, associating with their march the garrison, and such of the citizens as were fit to bear arms, and to leave the capital to its fate. On the 14th of September, the troops marched with downcast looks, furled banners, and silent drums, through the streets of the metro-



polis, and went out at the Kolomna gate. Their long columns of retreat were followed by the greater part of the remaining population. Meanwhile Rostopchin, ere departing, held a public court of justice. Two men were brought before him, one a Russian, an enthusiast, who had learned in Germany, and been foolish enough to express at Moscow, some of the old French republican doctrines. The other was a Frenchman, whom the near approach of his countrymen had emboldened to hold some indiscreet political language. The father of the Russian delinquent was present. He was expected to interfere. He did so; but it was to demand his son's death.

"I grant you," said the Governor, "some moments to take leave and to bless him."

"Shall I bless a rebel?" said this Scythian Brutus. "Be my curse upon him that has betrayed his country!"

The criminal was hewed down on the spot.

"Stranger," said Rostopchin to the Frenchman, "thou hast been imprudent; yet it is but natural thou shouldst desire the coming of thy countrymen. Be free, then, and go to meet them. Tell them there was one traitor in Russia, and thou hast seen him punished."

The governor then caused the jails to be



opened, and the criminals to be set at liberty; and, abandoning the desolate city to these banditti, and a few of the lowest rabble, he mounted his horse, and putting himself at the head of his retainers, followed the march of the army.



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## CHAPTER LXXVII.

*On 14th September, Napoleon reaches Moscow, which he finds deserted by the Inhabitants. — The City is discovered to be on Fire about midnight. — Napoleon takes up his quarters in the Kremlin. — The Fire is stopt next day, but arises again at night — Believed to be wilful, and several Russians apprehended and Shot. — On the third night, the Kremlin is discovered to be on Fire. — Buonaparte leaves it, and takes his abode at Petrowsky. — The Fire rages till the 19th, when four-fifths of the City are burnt down. — On the 20th, Buonaparte returns to the Kremlin. — Discussion as to the origin of this great Conflagration. — Disorganization and Indiscipline of the French Army. — Difficulty as to the Route on leaving Moscow. — Lauriston sent with a Letter to the Emperor Alexander. — Retrospect of the march of the Russian Army, after leaving Moscow. —*



*Lauriston has an interview with Koutousoff on 5th October. — The result. — Armistice made by Murat. — Preparations for Retreat. — The Emperor Alexander refuses to treat.*

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ON the 14th September 1812, while the rear-guard of the Russians were in the act of evacuating Moscow, Napoleon reached the hill called the Mount of Salvation, because it is there where the natives kneel and cross themselves at first sight of the Holy City.

Moscow seemed lordly and striking as ever, with the steeples of its thirty churches, and its copper domes glittering in the sun; its palaces of Eastern architecture mingled with trees, and surrounded with gardens; and its Kremlin, a huge triangular mass of towers, something between a palace and a castle, which rose like a citadel out of the general mass of groves and buildings. But not a chimney sent up smoke, not a man appeared on the battlements, or at the gates. Napoleon gazed every moment, expecting to see a train of bearded boyards arriving to fling themselves at his feet, and place their wealth at his disposal. His first excla-



mation was, "Behold at last that celebrated city!" — His next, "It was full time." His army, less regardful of the past or the future, fixed their eyes on the goal of their wishes, and a shout of "Moscow! — Moscow!" — passed from rank to rank.

Meantime no one interrupted his meditations, until a message came from Murat. He had pushed in among the Cossacks, who covered the rear of the Russians, and readily admitted to a parley the chivalrous champion, whom they at once recognised, having so often seen him blazing in the van of the French cavalry. The message which he sent to Buonaparte intimated, that Miloradovitch threatened to burn the town, if his rear was not allowed time to march through it. This was a tone of defiance. Napoleon, however, granted the armistice, for which no inhabitants were left to be grateful.

After waiting two hours, he received from some French inhabitants, who had hidden themselves during the evacuation, the strange intelligence that Moscow was deserted by its population. The tidings that a population of two hundred and fifty thousand persons had left their native city was incredible, and Napoleon still



commanded the boyards, the public functionaries, to be brought before him; nor could he be convinced of what had actually happened, till they led to his presence some of that refuse of humanity, the only live creatures they could find in the city, but they were wretches of the lowest rank. When he was at last convinced that the desertion of the capital was universal, he smiled bitterly, and said, "The Russians will soon learn better the value of their capital."

The signal was now given for the troops to advance; and the columns, still in a state of wonder at the solitude and silence which received them everywhere, penetrated through that assemblage of huts, mingled with palaces, where it seemed that Penury, which had scarce means to obtain the ordinary necessities of life, had for her next door neighbour all the wealth and profuse expenditure of the East. At once the silence was broken by a volley of musketry, which some miserable fanatics poured from the battlements of the Kremlin on the first French troops that approached the palace of the Czars. These wretches were most of them intoxicated; yet the determined obstinacy with which they threw away their lives, was another feature of that rugged patriotism of which the French



had seen, and were yet to see, so many instances.

When he entered the gates of Moscow, Buonaparte, as if unwilling to encounter the sight of the empty streets, stopt immediately on entering the first suburb. His troops were quartered in the desolate city. During the first few hours after their arrival, an obscure rumour, which could not be traced, but one of those which are sometimes found to get abroad before the approach of some awful certainty, announced that the city would be endangered by fire in the course of the night. The report seemed to arise from those evident circumstances which rendered the event probable, but no one took any notice of it, until at midnight, when the soldiers were startled from their quarters by the report that the town was in flames. The memorable conflagration began amongst the coachmakers' warehouses and workshops in the Bazaar, or general market, which was the most rich district of the city. It was imputed to accident, and the progress of the flames was subdued by the exertions of the French soldiers. Napoleon, who had been roused by the tumult, hurried to the spot, and when the alarm seemed at an end, he retired, not to his former



quarters in the suburbs, but to the Kremlin, the hereditary palace of the only sovereign whom he had ever treated as an equal, and over whom his successful arms had now attained such an apparently immense superiority. Yet he did not suffer himself to be dazzled by the advantage he had obtained, but availed himself of the light of the blazing Bazaar, to write to the Emperor proposals of peace with his own hand. They were dispatched by a Russian officer of rank, who had been disabled by indisposition from following the army. But no answer was ever returned.

Next day the flames had disappeared, and the French officers luxuriously employed themselves in selecting out of the deserted palaces of Moscow, that which best pleased the fancy of each for his residence. At night the flames again arose in the north and west quarters of the city. As far the greater part of the houses were built of wood, the conflagration spread with the most dreadful rapidity. This was at first imputed to the blazing brands and sparkles which were carried by the wind; but at length it was observed, that, as often as the wind changed, and it changed three times in that terrible night, new flames broke always forth in



that direction, where the existing gale was calculated to direct them on the Kremlin. These horrors were increased by the chance of explosion. There was, though as yet unknown to the French, a magazine of powder in the Kremlin; besides that a park of artillery, with its ammunition, was drawn up under the Emperor's window. Morning came, and with it a dreadful scene. During the whole night, the metropolis had glared with an untimely and unnatural light. It was now covered with a thick and suffocating atmosphere, of almost palpable smoke. The flames defied the efforts of the French soldiery, and it is said that the fountains of the city had been rendered inaccessible, the water-pipes cut, and the fire-engines destroyed or carried off.

Then came the reports of fire-balls having been found burning in deserted houses; of men and women, that, like demons, had been seen openly spreading the flames, and who were said to be furnished with combustibles for rendering their dreadful work more secure. Several wretches against whom such acts had been charged, were seized upon, and, probably without much inquiry, were shot on the spot. While it was almost impossible to keep the roof of



the Kremlin clear of the burning brands which showered down the wind, Napoleon watched from the windows the course of the fire which devoured his fair conquest, and the exclamation burst from him, "These are indeed Scythians!"

The equinoctial gales rose higher and higher upon the third night, and extended the flames, with which there was no longer any human power of contending. At the dead hour of midnight, the Kremlin itself was found to be on fire. A soldier of the Russian police, charged with being the incendiary, was turned over to the summary vengeance of the Imperial Guard. Buonaparte was then, at length, persuaded, by the entreaties of all around him, to relinquish his quarters in the Kremlin, to which, as the visible mark of his conquest, he had seemed to cling with the tenacity of a lion holding a fragment of his prey. He encountered both difficulty and danger in retiring from the palace, and before he could gain the city-gate, he had to traverse with his suite streets arched with fire, and in which the very air they breathed was suffocating. At length, he gained the open country, and took up his abode in a palace of the Czar's called Petrowsky, about a French league from the city. As he looked back on



the fire, which, under the influence of the autumnal wind, swelled and surged around the Kremlin, like an infernal ocean around a sable Pandemonium, he could not suppress the ominous expression, « This bodes us great misfortune. »

The fire continued to triumph unopposed, and consumed in a few days what it had cost centuries to raise. « Palaces and temples, » says a Russian author, « monuments of art, and miracles of luxury, the remains of ages which had past away, and those which had been the creation of yesterday ; the tombs of ancestors, and the nursery-cradles of the present generation, were indiscriminately destroyed. Nothing was left of Moscow save the remembrance of the city, and the deep resolution to avenge its fall. » \*)

The fire raged till the 19th with unabated violence, and then began to slacken for want of fuel. It is said, four-fifths of this great city were laid in ruins.

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\*) Karamzin, a Russian historian of eminence, whose works were expressly excepted from the censorship, by the late Emperor Alexander.



On the 20th, Buonaparte returned to the Kremlin; and, as if in defiance of the terrible scene which he had witnessed, took measures as if he were disposed to make Moscow his residence for some time. He even caused a theatre to be fitted up, and plays to be acted by performers sent from Paris, to show perhaps that it was not in the most terrible of elements to overawe his spirit, or interrupt his usual habits of life. In the same style of indifference or affectation, a set of very precise regulations respecting the Theatre Français was drawn up by the Emperor amid the ruins of Moscow. He was not superior to the affectation of choosing distant places and foreign capitals for the date of domestic and trifling ordinances. It gave the Emperor an air of ubiquity, to issue rules for a Parisian theatre from the Kremlin. It had already been prophesied that he would sacrifice his army to have the pleasure of dating a decree from Moscow.

The conflagration of Moscow was so complete in its devastation; so important in its consequences; so critical in the moment of its commencement, that almost all the eye-witnesses have imputed it to a sublime, yet almost horrible exertion of patriotic decision on the part of the



Russians, their government, and, in particular, of the governor, Rostopchin. Nor has the positive denial of Count Rostopchin himself diminished the general conviction, that the fire was directed by him. All the French officers continue to this day to ascribe the conflagration to persons whom he had employed.

On the other hand, there are many, and those good judges of the probabilities in such an event, who have shown strong reasons for believing, that Moscow shared but the fate of a deserted city, which is almost always burnt as well as pillaged. We have stated elsewhere the arguments on both sides; \*) and in the meantime, we shall only observe, that should the scale of evidence incline to the side of accident, History will lose one of the grandest, as well as most terrible incidents which she has on record. Considered as a voluntary Russian act, the burning of their capital is an incident of gigantic character, which we consider with awe and terror; our faculties so confused by the immensity of the object, considered in its different bearings,

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\*) See Appendix, No. II.



that we hardly know whether to term it vice or virtue, patriotism or vengeance.

Whether the conflagration of Moscow was, or was not, the work of Russian will, and Russian hands, the effects which it was to produce on the campaign were likely to be of the most important character. Buonaparte's object in pressing on to the capital at every risk, was to grasp a pledge, for the redemption of which he had no doubt Alexander would be glad to make peace on his own terms. But the prize of his victory, however fair to the sight, had, like that fabled fruit said to grow on the banks of the Dead Sea, proved in the end but soot and ashes. Moscow, indeed, he had seized, but it had perished in his grasp; and far from being able to work upon Alexander's fears for its safety, it was reasonable to think that its total destruction had produced the most vehement resentment on the part of the Russian monarch, since Napoleon received not even the civility of an answer to his conciliatory letter. And thus the acquisition so much desired as the means of procuring peace, had become, by this catastrophe, the cause of the most irreconcilable enmity.



Neither was it a trifling consideration, that Napoleon had lost by this dreadful fire a great part of the supplies, which he expected the capture of the metropolis would have contributed for the support of his famished army. Had there existed in Moscow the usual population of a capital, he would have found the usual modes of furnishing its markets in full activity. These, doubtless, are not of the common kind, for provisions are sent to this capital, not, as is usual, from fertile districts around the city, but from distant regions, whence they are brought by water-carriage in the summer, and by sledges, which travel on the ice and frozen snow, in the winter time. To Moscow, with its usual inhabitants, these supplies must have been remitted as usual, lest the numerous population of 250,000 and upwards, should be famished, as well as the enemy's army. But Moscow deserted, — Moscow burnt, and reduced to mountains of cinders and ashes, — had no occasion for such supplies; nor was it to be supposed that the provinces from which they were usually remitted, would send them to a heap of ruins, where there remained none to be fed, save the soldiers of the invading army. This conviction came with heavy anticipation on the Emperor of France and his principal officers.



Meanwhile, the ruins of Moscow, and the remnant which was left standing, afforded the common soldiers an abundance of booty during their short day of rest; and, as is their nature, they enjoyed the present moment without thinking of futurity. The army was dispersed over the city, plundering at pleasure whatever they could find; sometimes discovering quantities of melted gold and silver, sometimes rich merchandize and precious articles, of which they knew not the value; sometimes articles of luxury, which contrasted strangely with their general want of comforts, and even necessities. It was not uncommon to see the most tattered, shoeless wretches, sitting among bales of rich merchandize, or displaying costly shawls, precious furs, and vestments rich with barbaric pearl and gold. In another place, there were to be seen soldiers possessed of tea, sugar, coffee, and similar luxuries, while the same individuals could scarce procure carrion to eat, or muddy water to drink. Of sugar, in particular, they had such quantities, that they mixed it with their horse-flesh soup. The whole was a contrast of the wildest and most lavish excess, with the last degree of necessity, disgusting to witness, and most ominous in its presage. *They* esteemed themselves happiest of all, who could procure



intoxicating liquors, and escape by some hours of insensibility from the scene of confusion around them.

Napoleon and his officers toiled hard to restore some degree of organization to the army. The plundering, which could not be discontinued, was latterly set about more regularly; and detachments were sent to pillage the ruins of Moscow, as in turn of duty. The rest of the troops were withdrawn from the city, or confined to their quarters in the buildings which remained entire. Everything was done to protect the few peasants, who brought provisions to the camp for sale. Nevertheless, few appeared, and at length not one was to be seen. The utmost exertion, therefore, could not, it was obvious, render Moscow a place of rest for many days; and the difficulty of choosing the route by which to leave it, became now an embarrassing consideration.

There were three modes of proceeding on evacuating Moscow, all of which had in their turn Napoleon's anxious consideration. First, he might march on St Petersburg, and deal with the modern, as he had with the ancient capital of Russia. This counsel best suited the daring genius of Buonaparte, ever bent upon the game



by which all is to be lost, or all won. He even spoke of that measure as a thing resolved; but Berthier and Bessieres prevailed in convincing him, that the lateness of the season, the state of the roads, the want of provisions, and the condition of the army, rendered such an attempt totally desperate. The second proposed measure, was to move southwards upon the fertile province of Kalouga, and thence to proceed westward towards Smolensk, which was their first depôt. In this route Napoleon must have fought a general action with Koutousoff, who, as we shall presently see, had taken a position to the south of Moscow. This, indeed, would have been, in many respects, a motive with Napoleon to take the route to Kalouga; but a second battle of Borodino, as obstinately fought, and as doubtful in its termination, would have been a bad commencement for a retreat, the flanks of which would certainly be annoyed, even if the Moldavian army did not intercept the front. The third plan was, to return by the route on which he had advanced, and on which, by a few places hastily fortified, he still preserved a precarious communication with Smolensk, Witepsk, and so on to Wilna. This line, however, lay through the countries which had been totally destroyed and wasted by the advance of the army,



and where all the villages and hamlets had been burned and abandoned, either by the French or the Russians themselves. To take this direction was to confront famine.

Napoleon's hesitation on this important point, was increased by the eagerness with which he still adhered to his own plan for the conclusion of the war, by a triumphant peace with Alexander, concluded on the ruins of his capital. His mind, which ever clung with tenacity to the opinions he had once formed, revolved the repeated instances in which his voice had in such circumstances commanded peace, and dictated the articles. The idea which he had formed of Alexander's disposition during the interviews of Tilsit and Erfurt, had made him regard the Czar as docile, and disposed to submit to the rebuke of his own predominant genius. But he mistook the character of the sovereign, and of the nation he commanded. The one, although he had hitherto encountered nothing but defeat and disaster, was determined not to submit, while his immense resources furnished the means of resistance. The other, in all probability, would not have permitted the sovereign to act otherwise, for the popular indignation was now at spring-tide; and from the palace of the Czar



to the hut of the slave, there was nothing breathed save resistance and revenge.

It was in vain, therefore, that Napoleon expected that Alexander would open some communication on the subject of, or would answer, the letter which he had sent, during the first night he possessed Moscow, by a Russian officer. He grew impatient at length, and resolved himself to make farther advances. But not even to his confidential advisers would he own that he sought peace on his own score; he affected to be anxious only on account of Alexander. "He is my friend," he said; "a prince of excellent qualities; and should he yield to his inclinations, and propose peace, the barbarians in their rage will dethrone and put him to death, and fill the throne with some one less tractable. We will send Caulaincourt to break the way for negotiation, and prevent the odium which Alexander might incur, by being the first to propose a treaty." The Emperor abode by this resolution, excepting in so far as he was persuaded with some difficulty to dispatch General Count Lauriston, his aide-de-camp, upon this embassy; lest Caulaincourt's superior rank of Master of the Horse, might indicate that his master sought a treaty, less for Alexander's security than his own,



and that of his army. Lauriston, who was well acquainted with the Russian character, urged several doubts against the policy of the mission intrusted to him, as betraying their necessity to the enemy; and recommended that the army should, without losing a day, commence its retreat by Kalouga, and the more southern route. Buonaparte, however, retained his determination, and Lauriston was dismissed with a letter to the Emperor Alexander, and the parting instruction, — "I must have peace, and will sacrifice, to obtain it, all except my honour."

Before we give the result of Lauriston's mission, it is proper to trace the movements of the Russian grand army, since their melancholy march through the city of Moscow. They left the city by the route of Kolomna, and marched for two days in that direction; and having thus imposed on the enemy a belief, that they were bent in securing a retreat to the south-east, leaving at once the eastern and northern provinces undefended, Koutousoff executed one of the most dexterous movements of the Russian army during the campaign. The observation of the St Petersburg road was intrusted to Winzengerode, with a small flying army. Koutousoff himself, turning to the southward, performed a circular march,



of which Moscow was the centre, so as to transfer the grand army to the route towards Kalouga. They marched in stern dejection; for the wind, great as the distance was, showered among their ranks the ashes of their burning capital, and in the darkness, the flames were seen to rage like a huge ocean of fire. The movement was a bold one also, for, although performed at a respectful distance from the French army, yet the march was for three days a flank march, and consequently of a very delicate character. The Russians manœuvred, however, with such precision, that they performed their movement in perfect safety; and while the French troops, who had been sent in their pursuit, were amusing themselves with pursuing two regiments of horse, which had been left on the Kolomna road, they were astonished to find that the grand Russian army had assumed a position on the south-eastern side of Moscow, from which they could operate upon and harass, nay, intercept at pleasure, Napoleon's line of communication with Smolensk and with Poland, and at the same time cover the town of Kalouga, where great magazines had been assembled, and that of Toula, famed for the fabrication of arms and artillery.

The ardent King of Naples, with the advanced guard of his brother-in-law's army, at length



moved against their enemies on the Kalouga road; but little took place save skirmishes, by which the Russians protected their rear, until they took up a stationary posture in the strong position of Taroutino. They were here admirably placed for the purpose of covering the important town of Kalouga. There are three routes which lead from Moscow to that city; and Taroutino being situated in the middle road, an army placed there can with little trouble, by moving to the right or the left, occupy either of the other two. The front of the Russian position was covered by the river Nara. The camp was amply supplied with provisions from the wealthy and plentiful districts in the rear; and as the spirit of the country more and more developed itself, recruits and new-raised regiments arrived faster than the exertions of the veteran soldiers could train them to arms, although the Russian, from his docility and habits of obedience, receives military discipline with unusual readiness. The Ukraine and Don sent twenty regiments of Cossacks, most of them men who, having already served their stipulated time, were excused from military duty, but who universally assumed the lance and sabre at a crisis of such emergency.

Murat at the same time pressed forward to establish himself in front of the Russian camp,



for the purpose of watching their motions. In his progress, he passed what had been a splendid domain, belonging to Count Rostopchin, the governor of Moscow. It was in ashes; and a letter from the proprietor informed the French he had destroyed it, lest it should give an invader comfort or shelter. \*) The same spirit possessed the peasantry. They set fire to their hamlets, wherever they could be of use to the invaders; proclaimed the punishment of death to all of their own order, who, from avarice or fear, should be tempted to supply the enemy with provisions; and they inflicted it without mercy on such as incurred the penalty. It is an admitted fact, that when the French, in order

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\*) "Frenchmen," this was the tenor of this remarkable intimation, "for eight years it has been my pleasure to embellish this my family residence. The inhabitants, 1700 in number, will leave it as you approach; and it will be reduced to ashes, that not one of you may pollute it by your presence. I have left you two palaces in Moscow, with their turniture, worth half a million of rubles. Here you will only find ashes."



to induce their refractory prisoners to labour in their service, branded some of them on the hand with the letter N, as a sign that they were the serfs of Napoleon, one peasant laid his branded hand on a log of wood, and struck it off with the axe which he held in the other, in order to free himself from the supposed thralldom. The French who looked on shuddered, and cursed the hour which brought them into collision with enemies of such a rugged and inexorable disposition. The patriotism of the peasants in general had been turned to still better account by the partizan or guerilla warfare, for which Spain had given an example.

Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis Davidoff, who became well known to the French by the name of *le Capitaine Noir*, had suggested this species of war to Prince Bagration, a little before the battle of Borodino; and had obtained distinguished success at the head of a small party of Cossacks and Hussars, by his operations on the route betwixt Gjatzen and Wiazma, in cutting off supplies, and defeating small detached parties of the enemy. He was speedily put at the head of a much larger force; and other free corps of the same kind were raised, with brave and active spirits at their head. They scoured the country,



infested the French lines of communication, drove in their outposts, and distressed them on every point.

The peasants also took arms, and formed themselves into bodies of partizans, rendered formidable by their perfect knowledge of the woods, by-paths, and passes. They have a natural contempt for foreigners, for whom they have no other name than «the deaf and dumb,” to denote their ignorance of the Russian language. The events of the campaign, especially the conflagration of Moscow, had converted their scorn into deadly hatred; and whatever soldier of Napoleon fell into their hands, was put to death without scruple or pity.

Meantime the cavalry of Murat, which afforded the best means of chastising and repressing these bands, gradually declined under hard work and want of subsistence; and, although little used to droop or distress himself about the future, the King of Naples wrote repeatedly from his advanced post, to press Napoleon no longer to delay a retreat which was become absolutely necessary. It was while matters were in this state that General Lauriston arrived at the Russian out-posts, and after a good deal of difficulty, real or affected, was at length admitted to an



interview with Koutousoff, at midnight on the 5th October. His reception was such as to make him consider himself a welcome envoy.

Lauriston opened his business with a proposal for exchange of prisoners, which was of course declined on the part of Koutousoff, aware, that while soldiers were plenty among the Russians, the ranks of Napoleon must become every day thinner. Lauriston next introduced the subject of the independent bands, and proposed that an end should be put to this species of unusual war, in which so many cruelties were committed. Koutousoff replied, that this kind of partizan war did not depend on his orders, but arose from the native spirit of the country, which led the Russians to regard the French invasion as an incursion of Tartars. General Lauriston then entered on the real business of his mission, by asking whether "this war, which had assumed such an unheard-of character, was to last for ever;" declaring, at the same time, his master the Emperor of France's sincere desire, to terminate hostilities between two great and generous nations.

The astucious old Russian saw Buonaparte's evident necessity in his affected wish for peace,



and immediately adopted the course most likely to gain time, which must at once increase the difficulties of the French, and his own power of availing himself of them. He affected a sincere desire to promote a pacification, but declared he was absolutely prohibited either to receive any proposal to that effect himself, or to transmit such to the Emperor. He therefore declined to grant General Lauriston the desired passport to the presence of Alexander, but he offered to send General Wolkonsky, an aide-de-camp of the Czar, to learn his imperial pleasure.

The express charge which Lauriston had received from his master, that peace was to be obtained on any terms not inferring dishonour, did not permit him to object to this arrangement. He was even encouraged to hope it might prove effectual, so much satisfaction was expressed by General Koutousoff and the officers of his military family, all of whom seemed to deplore the continuance of the war, and went so far as to say, that this annunciation of a treaty would be received at Petersburg with public rejoicings. These accounts being transmitted to Napoleon, lulled him into a false security. He returned to his original opinion, which had been shaken,



but not subverted; and announced to his generals, with much satisfaction, that they had but to wait a fortnight for a triumphant pacification. He boasted his own superior knowledge of the Russian character, and declared, that on the arrival of his overture for peace, Petersburg would be full of bonfires.

Napoleon, however, was not so confident of peace as to approve a singular sort of armistice which Murat had entered into with the Russians. It was to be broken off, on an intimation of three hours' space, by either party to the other; and, while in existence, it only subsisted along the fronts of the two armies, leaving the Russians at liberty to carry on their partizan war on the flanks as much as ever. The French could not obtain a load of furze, or a cart of provisions, without fighting for it, and often to disadvantage. A large party of the dragoons of the Imperial Guard were surprised and piked by the Cossacks. Two considerable convoys were surprised and cut off on the road to Mojaïsk, the only communication which the French army had with its magazines and reinforcements. The French were surprised, and lost a detachment in the town of Vereia, on Murat's left flank. Thus the war continued everywhere, except on the



front of the armies, where it had the greatest chance to be favourable to the French.

This bad policy is not to be imputed to Napoleon, who had refused to authorise the armistice, but to the vanity of Murat, under whose authority it was still observed. It gave him an opportunity of amusing himself, by caracoling on the neutral ground betwixt the camps, displaying his handsome form, gallant horsemanship, and splendid dresses, to the soldiers on both sides; receiving the respectful salutes of the Russian patrols, and the applause of the Cossacks. These last used to crowd around him, partly in real admiration of his chivalrous appearance and character, which was of a kind to captivate these primitive warriors, and partly, doubtless, from their natural shrewdness, which saw the utility of maintaining his delusion. They called him their Hettman; and he was so intoxicated with their applause, as to have been said to nourish the wild idea of becoming in earnest King of the Cossacks.

Such delusions could not for ever lull Murat's vigilance to sleep. The war was all around him, and his forces were sinking under a suc-



cession of petty hostilities; while the continual rolling of drums, and the frequent platoon firing, heard from behind the Russian encampment, intimated how busily they were engaged in drilling numerous bodies of fresh recruits. The Russian officers at the out-posts began to hold ominous language, and ask the French if they had made a composition with the Northern Winter, Russia's most fearful ally. "Stay another fortnight," they said, "and your nails will drop off, and your fingers fall from your hands, like boughs from a blighted tree." The numbers of the Cossacks increased so much, as to resemble one of the ancient Scythian emigrations; and wild and fantastic figures, on unbroken horses, whose manes swept the ground, seemed to announce that the inmost recesses of the desert had sent forth their inhabitants. Their grey-bearded chiefs sometimes held expostulations with the French officers, in a tone very different from that which soothed the ears of Murat. "Had you not," they said, "in France, food enough, water enough, air enough, to subsist you while you lived, — earth enough to cover you when you died; and why come you to enrich our soil with your remains, which by right belong to the land where you were born?" Such evil bodements affected the van of the army,



from whence Murat transmitted them to the Emperor.

Immured in the recesses of the Kremlin, Napoleon persisted in awaiting the answer to the letter dispatched by Lauriston. It had been sent to Petersburg on the 6th, and an answer could not be expected before the 26th. To have moved before that period, might be thought prudent in a military point of view; but, politically considered, it would greatly injure his reputation for sagacity, and destroy the impression of his infallibility. Thus sensible, and almost admitting that he was wrong, he determined, nevertheless, to persevere in the course he had chosen, in hopes that Fortune, which never before failed him, might yet stand his friend in extremity.

A bold scheme is said to have been suggested by Daru, to turn Moscow into an entrenched camp, and occupy it as winter-quarters. They might kill the remainder of the horses, he said, and salt them down; foraging must do the rest. Napoleon approved of what he termed a Lion's counsel. But the fear of what might happen in France, from which this plan would have secluded them for six months, induced him finally to reject it. It might be added, that the ob-



taining supplies by marauding was likely to become more and more difficult, as winter and the scarcity increased, especially now that the country around Moscow was completely ruined. Besides, if Napoleon fixed himself at Moscow for the winter, not only his line of communications, but Lithuania, and the Grand Duchy, which formed the base of his operations, ran every risk of being invaded. On the south-west, the dubious faith of Austria was all he had to trust to, for the purpose of resisting the united armies of Tchitchagoff and Tormasoff, which might be augmented to 100,000 men, and make themselves masters of Warsaw and Wilna. On the northern extremity of his general line of operations, Macdonald and St Cyr might prove unable to resist Wittgenstein and Steingel; and he had in his rear Prussia, the population of which Napoleon justly considered as ready to take arms against him at the first favourable opportunity. The scheme, therefore, for occupying winter-quarters at Moscow was rejected as fraught with dangers.

Even when appearances of a fall of snow reminded the Emperor of the climate which he was braving, his preparations for retreat were slowly and reluctantly made; and some of them were dictated by his vanity, rather than his



judgment. All the pictures, images, and ornaments of the churches, which were left unburnt, were collected, and loaded upon wains, to follow the line of march, already too much encumbered with baggage. A gigantic cross, which stood on the tower of Ivan the Great, the tallest steeple of Moscow, was dismounted with much labour, that it might add to the trophies, which were already sufficiently cumbrous. On the same principle, Napoleon was angry when it was proposed to leave some of his immense train of artillery, which was greatly too numerous for the reduced size of his army. "He would leave no trophy for the Russians to triumph over." That all the artillery and baggage might be transported, he surprised his officers by an order to buy twenty thousand horses, where, perhaps, there were not an hundred to be sold, and when those which they had already were daily dying for want of forage. The latter article, he ordered, should be provided for two months, in depots on his route. This mandate might make known his wants; but as it certainly could contribute little to supply them, it must only have been issued for the purpose of keeping up appearances. Perhaps the desire to have some excuse to himself and others for indulging in his lingering wish to remain a day or two longer, to await the answer



from St Petersburg, might be a secret cause of issuing orders, which must occasion some inquiry ere it could be reported in what extent they could be obeyed.

If this were the case, it was the rash indulgence of a groundless hope. The Emperor Alexander refused to hear of any negotiation for peace, and took no other notice of that which had been transmitted to him by Wolkonsky, than to pass a censure on the Russian officers concerned, and Prince Koutousoff himself, for having had the least intercourse with the French generals. He reminded the Generalissimo how positive his instructions had been on this subject, and that he had enjoined him on no account to enter into negotiations or correspondence with the invaders; and he revived and enforced his injunctions to that effect.

The sagacious general was not, it is to be supposed, greatly affected by a rebuke which was only given for form's sake. He made his soldiers acquainted with the Emperor's unalterable resolution to give no terms to the invaders; and spreading through the camp, at the same time, the news of the victory at Salamanca, and the evacuation of Madrid, pointed out to them, that Frenchmen, like others, were liable to defeat;



and called on his soldiers to emulate the courage of the British and patriotism of the Spaniards. While the minds of the soldiery were thus excited and encouraged, Koutousoff took measures for anticipating Napoleon, by putting an end to the armistice and assuming an offensive posture.



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## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

*Murat's Armistice broken off — He is attacked and defeated. — Napoleon leaves Moscow on 19th October. — Bloody skirmish at Malo-Yaroslavetz. — Napoleon in great danger while reconnoitring — He retreats to Vereia, where he meets Mortier and the Young Guard. — Winzengerode made prisoner, and insulted by Buonaparte. — The Kremlin is blown up by the French. — Napoleon continues his retreat towards Poland — Its Horrors. — Conflict near Wiasma, on 3d November, where the French lose 4000 men — Cross the river Wiasma during the night. — Proceedings of the Viceroy of Italy — He reaches Smolensk, in great distress, on the 13th. — Buonaparte arrives at Smolensk, with the headmost division of the Grand Army. — Sketch of the calamitous Retreat of Ney's Division. — The whole French Army now collected at Smolensk. — Retrospect of proceedings on the extreme flanks*



*of Napoleon's line of advance. — Cautious conduct of Prince Schwarzenberg. — Winzengerode freed on his road to Paris, by a body of Cossacks. — Tchitchagoff occupies Minsk on 14th November, and Lambert, one of his Generals, captures Borizoff, after severe fighting. — Perilous situation of Napoleon.*

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It was easy to make Murat himself the active person in breaking off the armistice, a step which the Russian general preferred, lest a formal intimation of rupture on his own side, might lead the King of Naples to suspect his further purpose. Accordingly, a Cossack having fired his carabine when Murat was examining the advanced guards, irritated, as it was designed to do, that fiery soldier, and induced him to announce to the Russian generals that the armistice was ended. The Russians were the first to commence hostilities.

The camp, or position, which Murat occupied, Worodonow, was covered on the right, and on the centre, by a rivulet or brook, running in a deep ravine; but the stream taking another direction, left a good part of the left wing uncovered, which was at the same time exposed to



surprise from a wood covering a little plain where his left rested. The sum of Murat's force, which consisted of the cavalry, and Poniatowski's division, was computed to be upwards of thirty thousand. It is singular that since the King of Naples expected an attack, as was intimated by his letter to his brother-in-law, he did not take the precaution of placing videttes and advanced guards in the woody plain. But the French, from their long train of success, were accustomed to despise their enemies, and to consider a surprise as a species of affront which they were never to be exposed to.

The Russians had laid a plan, which, had it been dexterously executed, must have destroyed the whole French advanced guard. An attack upon the left of Murat's position, by two Russian columns, under Count Orloff Dennizoff, was completely successful; but two other columns, by whom he should have been supported, did not arrive in time upon the point of action; the Poles, under Poniatowsky, made a glorious defence upon the right, and the vanguard was saved from utter destruction. But there was a complete defeat; the King of Naples lost his cannon, his position, and his baggage, had two thousand men killed, and lost fifteen hundred



prisoners. The French cavalry, except a few of those belonging to the guard, might be said to be utterly destroyed. Everything which the Russians saw in the enemies' camp, convinced them of the distress to which the French were reduced. Flayed cats and horse-flesh were the dainties found in the King of Naples' kitchen.

It was the 18th of October when first the noise of the cannon, and soon after, the arrival of an officer, brought intelligence of this mishap to Buonaparte. His energy of character, which had appeared to slumber during the days he had spent in a species of irresolution at Moscow, seemed at once restored. He poured forth, without hesitation, a torrent of orders suited for the occasion, directing the march of the troops to support Murat at Worodonow. Notwithstanding the miscellaneous variety of directions, each was distinct in itself, yet critically connected with the others, so as to form, on the whole, a perfect and well connected plan of movements. Part of the army marched that night; the rest had their route for the next morning. A garrison, under Mareschal Mortier, was left as a rear-guard in the Kremlin; from which it may be inferred that Napoleon did not as yet intend a final retreat.



On the 19th October, before day-break, the Emperor in person left Moscow, after an abode of thirty-four days. "Let us march," he said, "on Kalouga, and woe to those who shall oppose us." In this brief sentence he announced the whole plan of his retreat, which was to defeat the army of Koutousoff, or compel him to retire, and then himself to return to the frontiers of Poland, by the unwasted route of Kalouga, Medyn, Ynkowo, Elnia, and Smolensk.

The French army, which now filed from the gates of Moscow, and which continued to move on in a living mass for many hours, comprehended about one hundred and twenty thousand men, indifferently well appointed, and marching in good order. They were followed by no less than five hundred and fifty pieces of cannon, a train beyond proportion to their numbers, and two thousand artillery waggons. So far the march had a martial and imposing aspect. But in the rear of these came a confused crowd of many thousands, consisting of followers of the camp, stragglers who had rejoined it, and prisoners, many of them employed in carrying, or driving forward in wheelbarrows, the spoil of the conquerors.

Among these were French families formerly



inhabitants of Moscow, and composing what was called the French colony there, who could no longer reckon upon it as a safe place of abode, and who took the opportunity of retiring with their countrymen. There was, besides, a mixture and confusion of all imaginable kind of carriages, charged with the baggage of the army, and with the spoils of Moscow, as well those trophies which Napoleon had seized upon to amuse the Parisians, as what had been seized by individuals. This miscellaneous crowd resembled, according to Segur, a horde of Tartars returning from a successful invasion.

There were, as has been said, three routes from Moscow to Kalouga. The central, or old road, was that upon which the Russians lay encamped at their grand position of Taroutino, and in front of it was that of Worodonow, or Ynkowo, where they had so lately defeated Murat. Napoleon advanced a day's march on this route, in order to induce Koutousoff to believe that he proposed to attack his army in front; but this was only a feint, for, on the next day, he turned off by cross-roads into the eastern, or new road to Kalouga, with the view of advancing by that route until he should be past the Russian camp at Taroutino, on the right flank, and then of



again crossing from the new road to the old one, and thus getting possession of Borowsk and Mala-Yarowslavetz, towns on the same road to the southward of Taroutino. Thus the Russian position would be turned and avoided, while the main body of the French Emperor would be interposed betwixt Koutousoff and Kalouga, and the fertile southern provinces laid open to supply his army.

On the 23d, the Emperor with his main body attained Borowsk, and learned that the division of Delzons, which formed his vanguard, had occupied Mala-Yarowslavetz without opposition. Thus far all seemed to have succeeded according to Napoleon's wish.

But Koutousoff, so soon as he was aware of the danger in which he stood of being cut off from Kalouga, retaliated upon Napoleon his own manœuvre, and detached Generals Doktoroff and Raefskoi to the southward with a strong division, to outmarch the French, and occupy the position of Mala-Yarowslavetz, or to regain it if it was taken. He himself breaking up his camp at Taroutino, followed with his whole army by the road of Lectazowo, and marched so rapidly as to outstrip the French army, and reach the southward of Mala-Yarowslavetz, and conse-



quently again interpose himself between Napoleon and Kalouga.

Mala-Yarowslavetz offers a strong position. The town is built on a rapid declivity, broken with cliffs, the bottom of which is washed by the river Louja. On the northern side of the Louja, and connected with the town by a bridge, is a small plain with some huts, where Delzons' army bivouacked, having stationed two battalions to defend the town, and to watch the motions of the enemy. About four in the morning, when all were asleep, save the few sentinels who kept a careless watch, the Russians rushed into the place with dreadful outcries, drove the two battalions out of the town, and pushed them down the declivity and across the Louja to their main body. The noise of the artillery drew the attention of Eugene the Viceroy, who being only about three leagues from the scene of action, arrived there about the dawn. The soldiers of Delzon's division were then discovered struggling to regain the southern bank on which the town was situated. Encouraged by the approach of Eugene, Delzons pushed forward across the bridge, repelled the Russians, gained the middle of the village, and was shot dead. His brother, who endeavoured to drag the general's body from the



spot, incurred the same fate. General Guilleminot succeeded to the command, and threw a strong party of French into the church, which served as a citadel during the continuance of the action. The Russians rushed in once more, and drove Guilleminot back to the bridge. He was, however, succoured by Prince Eugene, who, after various less serious attempts, directed a whole division on the town.

Mala-Yarowslavetz was then recovered by the French; but, on reconnoitring a little farther, the whole of Koutousoff's army appeared on the plain beyond it, upwards of 100,000 men in number, and already possessed of a good position, which they were improving by entrenchments. Reinforcements from the Russian ranks immediately attacked the French, who were driven back on the town, which, being composed of wooden huts, was now in flames, and the French were again dispossessed of Mala-Yarowslavetz. The miserable ruins of this place were five times won and lost. At length, as the main body of the Grand Army came up under Napoleon himself, he found the French still in possession of the disputed village and its steep bank. But beyond them lay the numerous Russian army stationed and entrenched, supported by a very



large train of artillery, and seeming to render a battle absolutely indispensable to dislodge them from the position they had taken, and the fortifications with which they had secured themselves.

A council of war was held in the head-quarters of the Emperor, the hut of a poor weaver, divided by a screen, which served as the only partition. Here he received and meditated upon the reports of his generals, together with their opinions, and learned, to his distress, that Bessieres, and other good officers, reported that the position occupied by Koutousoff was unassailable. He resolved to judge with his own eyes on the next day, and in the meantime turned a negligent ear to the reports which informed him that the Cossacks were stealing through the woods, and insinuating themselves betwixt him and his advanced guard.

At dawning Napoleon mounted his horse, in order to reconnoitre, and incurred in the attempt a great risk of his life or freedom. It was about day-break, when, as attended by his staff and orderly soldiers, he crossed the little plain on the northern side of the Louja in order to gain the bridge, the level ground was suddenly filled with fugitives, in the rear of whom appeared some black masses. At first, the cries they made



seemed to be those of *Vive l'Empereur*; but the wild hurra of the Cossacks, and the swiftness of their advance, soon announced the children of the desert. "It is the Cossacks," said Rapp, seizing the reins of the Emperor's bridle. "You must turn back." Napoleon refused to retreat, drew his sword, as did his attendants, and placed themselves on the side of the high-way. Rapp's horse was wounded, and borne down by one of these lancers; but the Emperor and suite preserved their liberty by standing their ground, while the cloud of Cossacks, more intent on plunder than prisoners, past them within lance's length, without observing the inestimable prey which was within their grasp, and threw themselves upon some carriages which were more attractive. The arrival of the cavalry of the guard cleared the plain of this desultory but venturesome and pertinacious enemy; and Napoleon proceeded to cross the river and ascend the further bank, for the purpose of reconnoitring. In the meantime, the audacity of the Cossacks in their retreat, was equal to the wild character of their advance. They halted between the intervals of the French cavalry to load their pistols and carbines, perfectly secure that if pressed, their horses, at a touch of the whip which is attached to their bridle, would outstrip the exhausted chargers of the French Imperial Guard.



When the plain was attained, Napoleon saw on the front, and barring the road to Kalouga, Koutousoff, strongly posted with upwards of 100,000 men, and on the right, Platoff and six thousand Cossacks, with artillery. To this belonged the Pulk which he had just encountered, and who were returning from the flanks of his line, loaded with booty, while others seemed to meditate a similar attack. He returned to his miserable head-quarters, after having finished his reconnoitring party.

A second council of war was held, in which Buonaparte, having heard the conflicting opinions of Murat, who gave his advice for attacking Koutousoff, and of Davoust, who considered the position of the Russian general as one which, covering a long succession of defiles, might be defended inch by inch, at length found himself obliged to decide between the angry chiefs, and with a grief which seemed to deprive him of his senses for a little while, gave the unusual orders — to retreat. Buonaparte's own personal experience had convinced him how much, in advancing, his flanks would be exposed to the Hettman and his Cossacks, who had mustered in great force in the neighbourhood of Medyn. Other intelligence informed him that his rear



had been attacked by another body of Cossacks coming from Twer, and who belonged not to Koutousoff's army, but to another Russian division under the command of Winzengerode, which was advancing from the northward to re-occupy Moscow. This showed that the communications of the French were at the enemy's mercy on the west and the north, on flank and in rear, and seems to have determined the Emperor to give at length, and most reluctantly, the orders to retreat, for the purpose of returning to the frontiers by Vereia and Wiazma, the same road by which they had advanced.

It was very seldom that Napoleon resigned the settled purpose of his own mind, either to the advice of those around him, or to any combination of opposing circumstances. He usually received any objection founded on the difficulty of executing his orders, with an evasive answer, "*Ah, on ne peut pas!*" which, from the sarcastic mode in which he uttered the words, plainly showed that he imputed the alleged impossibility to the imbecility of the officer who used the apology. It might have been better for Napoleon, in many instances, had he somewhat abated this pertinacity of disposition; and yet it happened, that by yielding with unwonted docility



to the advice of his generals upon the present occasion, he actually retreated at the very moment when the Grand Russian army were withdrawing from the position in which Davoust had pronounced them unassailable. The reason of this retrograde movement, which involved the most serious risk, and which, had Napoleon been aware of it, might have yielded him access to the most fertile and unharassed provinces of Russia, was said to be Koutousoff's fears that the French, moving from their right flank, might have marched round the Russian army by the way of Medyn. The truth seems to be, that Koutousoff, though placed in command of the Grand Army, in order to indulge the soldiers with a general action, was slow and cautious by nature, and rendered more so by his advanced age. He forgot, that in war, to gain brilliant results, or even to prevent great reverses, some risks must be run; and having received just praise for his practised and cautious movements from the battle of Borodino till that of Mala-Yarowslavetz, he now carried the qualities of prudence and circumspection to the extreme, and shunned a general action, or rather the hazard of a general attack from the French, when he might certainly have trusted, first, in the chance (which turned out the reality) of Buonapartes retreat;



secondly, in the courage of his troops, and the strength of his position. "But Fortune," says Tacitus, "has the chief influence on warlike events," and she so ordered it, that both the hostile armies retired at once. So that while Buonaparte retreated towards Borowsk and Vereia, the route by which he had advanced, the Russians were leaving open before him the road to Kalouga, to gain which he had fought, and fought in vain, the bloody battle of Mala-Yarowslavetz. Favoured, however, by their immense clouds of light cavalry, the Russians learned the retrograde movement of Napoleon long before he could have any certain knowledge of theirs; and in consequence, manœuvred from their left so as to approach the points of Wiazma, and Gjatz, by which the French must needs pass, if they meant to march on Smolensk.

At Vereia, where Napoleon had his headquarters on the 27th October, he had the satisfaction to meet with Mortier, and that part of the Young Guard which had garrisoned the Kremlin. They brought with them an important prisoner, whom chance, or rather his own imprudence, had thrown into their hands. We have said incidentally, that upon the French army evacuating Moscow, Winzengerode, with



a considerable body of forces, advanced from the Twer to regain possession of the city. All was vacant and silent, except where the French garrison lay deserted and moody in the Kremlin, with a few detached outposts. Winzengerode, with a single aide-de-camp, rode imprudently forward, and both were seized by the French soldiers. The General waved a white handkerchief, and claimed the privilege of a flag of truce, alleging that he came to summon the French marshal to surrender. But Mortier refused him the privilege he claimed, observing, plausibly, that it was not the custom of general officers to summon garrisons in person.

Before leaving Moscow, the French, by the especial command of Napoleon, prepared to blow up the ancient palace of the Czars. As the Kremlin was totally useless as a fortification, even if Napoleon could have hoped ever to return to Moscow as a victor, this act of wanton mischief can only be imputed to a desire to do something personally displeasing to Alexander, because he had been found to possess a firmer character than his former friend had anticipated. The mode of executing this mandate, which, however, should be probably ascribed to the engineers, was a piece of additional barbarity. Aware that



some of the Russians who were left behind, men of the lowest rank and habits, would crowd in to plunder the palace when the French retreated, they attached long slow-matches to the gunpowder which was stored in the vaults of the palace, and lighted them when the rear of the French column marched out. The French were but at a short distance, when the explosion took place, which laid a considerable part of the Kremlin in ruins, and destroyed at the same time, in mere wantonness, a number of wretches, whom curiosity or love of plunder had, as was anticipated, induced to crowd within the palace. The Russian troops poured in, destroyed the mines which had not yet exploded, and extinguished the fire which had already caught the building. The patriotic foresight of the Russian peasants was now made manifest. We have mentioned the extreme wants of the French in the desolate city. No sooner was the Russian flag hoisted, than these wants vanished, as if by magic. Eighteen hundred cars, loaded with bread, poured in from the neighbourhood, on the very day that saw Moscow re-occupied. The bread, and the mode of conveying it, had been in secret prepared by these rustic patriots.

We return to the movements of the French army.



The dreadful explosion of the Kremlin shook the ground like an earthquake, and announced to Napoleon, then on his march against Koutousoff, that his commands had been obeyed. On the next day, a bulletin announced in a triumphant tone that the Kremlin, coeval with the Russian monarchy, *had existed*; and that Moscow was now but an impure laystall, while "the two hundred thousand persons which once formed her population, wandered through the forests, subsisting on wild roots, or perishing for want of them." With yet more audacity, the same official annunciation represents the retreat of the French as an advance on the road to victory. "The army expects to be put in motion on the 24th, to gain the Dwina, and to assume a position which will place it eighty leagues nearer to St Petersburg and to Wilna; a double advantage, since it will bring us nearer the mark we aim at, and the means by which it may be accomplished." While such splendid figments were circulated for the satisfaction of the people of Paris, the real question was, not whether the French were to approach St Petersburg, but by what means they were to get out of Russia with the semblance of an army remaining together.

Napoleon's spirit was observed to be soured by



the result of the affair at Mala-Yarowslavetz. It was indeed an operation of the last consequence, since it compelled a broken and suffering army to retreat through a country already wasted by their own advance, and by the acts of the Russians, where the houses were burnt, the inhabitants fled, and the roads broken up, instead of taking the road by Kalouga, through a region which offered both the means of subsistence and shelter. When the advanced season of the year was considered, it might be said that the retreat upon Vereia sounded the death-knell of the French army. These melancholy considerations did not escape Buonaparte himself, though he endeavoured to disguise them from others, by asserting, in a bulletin dated from Borowsk, that the country around was extremely rich, might be compared to the best parts of France and Germany, and that the weather reminded the troops of the sun and the delicious climate of Fontainebleau. His temper was visibly altered. Among other modes of venting his displeasure, he bitterly upbraided his prisoner Winzengerode, who was then brought before him. — "Who are you?" he said — "A man without a country! — You have ever been my enemy — You were in the Austrian ranks when I fought against them — I have become Austria's friend, and I find you



in those of Russia — You have been a warm instigator of the war; nevertheless, you are a native of the Confederation of the Rhine — you are my subject — you are a rebel — Seize on him, gens-d'armes! — Let him be brought to trial!”

To this threat, which showed that Napoleon accounted the States of the Confederacy not as appertaining in sovereignty to the princes whose names they bore, but as the immediate subjects of France, from whom the French Emperor was entitled to expect direct fealty, Napoleon added other terms of abuse; and called Winzengerode an English hireling and incendiary, while he behaved with civility to his aide-de-camp Narishkin, a native Russian. This violence, however, had no other consequence than that of the dismissal of Winzengerode, a close prisoner, to Lithuania, to be from thence forwarded to Paris. The presence of a captive of rank and reputation, an aide-de-camp of the Emperor of Russia, was designed of course to give countenance to the favourable accounts which Napoleon might find it convenient to circulate on the events of the campaign. It was not, however, Winzengerode's fortune to make this disagreeable journey. He was, as will be hereafter mentioned, released



in Lithuania, when such an event was least to be hoped for.

Accounts had been received, tending to confirm the opinion that the Russian army were moving on Medyn, with the obvious purpose of intercepting the French army, or at least harassing their passage at Wiazma or at Gjatz. By the orders of Napoleon, therefore, the army pressed forward on the last named town. They marched on in three corps d'armée. Napoleon was with the first of these armies. The second was commanded by the Viceroy of Italy, Prince Eugene. The third, which was destined to act as a rear-guard, was led by Davoust, whose love of order and military discipline might be, it was hoped, some check upon the license and confusion of such a retreat. It was designed that one day's march should intervene between the movements of each of these bodies, to avoid confusion, and to facilitate the collecting subsistence; being a delay of two, or at most three days, betwixt the operations of the advanced guard and that of the rear.

It has been often asked, nor has the question ever been satisfactorily answered, why Napoleon preferred that his columns should thus creep over the same ground in succession, instead of



the more combined and rapid mode of marching by three columns in front, by which he would have saved time, and increased, by the breadth of country which the march occupied, the means of collecting subsistence. The impracticability of the roads cannot be alleged, because the French army had come thither arranged in three columns, marching to the front abreast of each other, which was the reverse of their order in the retreat.

In the road, the army passed Borodino, the scene of the grand battle which exhibited so many vestiges of the French prowess, and of the loss they had sustained. This, the most sanguinary conflict of modern times, had been entirely without adequate advantages to the victors. The momentary possession of Moscow had annihilated every chance of an essential result by the catastrophe which followed, and the army which had been victorious at Borodino, was now escaping from their conquests, surrounded by danger on every hand, and already disorganized on many points, by danger, pain, and privation. At the convent of Kolotskoi, which had been the grand hospital of the French after the battle, many of the wounded were found still alive, though thousands more had perished for want of materials



necessary for surgical treatment, food of suitable quality, bandages, and the like. The survivors crawled to the door, and extended their supplicating hands to their countrymen as they passed onwards on their weary march. By Napoleon's orders, such of the patients as were able to bear being moved were placed on the sutler's carts, while the rest were left in the convent, together with some wounded Russian prisoners, whose presence, it was hoped, might be a protection to the French.

Several of those who had been placed in the carriages did not travel very far. The sordid wretches to whom the carts and wains, loaded with the plunder of Moscow, belonged, got rid in many cases of the additional burden imposed on them, by lagging behind the column of march in desolate places, and murdering the men entrusted to their charge. In other parts of the column, the Russian prisoners were seen lying on the road, their brains shot out by the soldiers appointed to guard them, but who took this mode of freeing themselves of the trouble. It is thus that a continued course of calamity renders men's minds selfish, ravenous, and fiendish, indifferent to what evil they inflict, because it can scarce equal that which they endure; as di-



vines say of the condemned spirits, that they are urged to malevolent actions against men, by a consciousness of their own state of reprobation.

Napoleon, with his first division of the Grand Army, reached Gjatzen without any other inconvenience than arose from the state of the roads, and the distresses of the soldiery. From Gjatzen he advanced in two marches to Wiazma, and halted there to allow Prince Eugene and Marshal Davoust to come up, who had fallen five day's march to the rear, instead of three days only, as had been directed. On the 1st November, the Emperor again resumed his painful retreat, leaving, however, the corps of Ney at Wiazma to reinforce and relieve the rear-guard under Davoust, who, he concluded, must be worn out with the duty. He resumed with his Old Guard the road to Dorogobouje, on which town he thought it probable the Russians might be moving to cut him off, and it was most important to prevent them.

Another order of Napoleon's confirms his sense of the danger which had now begun to oppress him. He commanded the spoils of Moscow, ancient armour, cannon, and the great cross of Iwan, to be thrown into the lake of Semelin, as trophies which he was unwilling to restore, and



unable to carry off. Some of the artillery, which the unfed horses were unable to drag forward, were also now necessarily left behind, though the circumstance was not communicated in every instance to Napoleon, who, bred in the artillery department, cherished, like many officers of that branch of service, a sort of superstitious reverence for his guns.

The Emperor, and the vanguard of his army, had hitherto passed unopposed. It was not so with the centre and rear. They were attacked, during the whole course of that march, by clouds of Cossacks, bringing with them a species of light artillery mounted on sledges, which, keeping pace with their motions, threw showers of balls among the column of the French; while the menaced charge of these irregular cavalry frequently obliged the march to halt, that the men might form lines or squares to protect themselves. The passage of streams where the bridges were broken down, and the horses and waggon were overturned on the precipitous banks, or in the miry fords, and where drivers and horses dropped down exhausted, added to this confusion when such obstacles occurred. The two divisions, however, having as yet seen no regular forces, passed the night of the 2d



November in deceitful tranquility, within two leagues of Wiazma, where Ney was lying ready to join them.

In that fatal night, Miloradowitch, one of the boldest, most enterprising, and active of the Russian generals, and whom the French were wont to call the Russian Murat, arrived with the vanguard of the Russian regulars, supported by Platoff and many thousand Cossacks, and being the harbinger of Koutousoff, and the whole grand army of Russia.

The old Russian general, when he learned the French Emperor's plan of retiring by Gjatz and Wiazma, instantly turning his own retreat into a movement to the left, arrived by cross roads from Mala-Yarowslavetz. The Russians now reached the point of action at day-break, pushed through Prince Eugene's line of march, and insulated his vanguard, while the Cossacks rode like a whirlwind among the host of stragglers and followers of the army, and drove them along the plain at the lance's point. The Viceroy was succoured by a regiment which Ney, though himself hardly pressed, dispatched to his aid from Wiazma, and his rearguard was disengaged by the exertions of Davoust, who marched hastily forward to extricate them. The Russian artillery,



which is superior in calibre, and carries farther than the French, manœuvred with rapidity, and kept up a tremendous cannonade, to which the French had no adequate means of replying. Eugene and Davoust made a most gallant defence; yet they would not have been able to maintain their ground, had Koutousoff, as was to have been expected, either come up in person, or sent a strong detachment to support his vanguard.

The battle lasted from seven in the morning till towards evening, when Eugene and Davoust pushed through Wiazma with the remains of their divisions, pursued by and almost mingled with the Russians, whose army marched into the town at the charging step, with drums beating, and all the indications of victory. The French divisions, under cover of the night, and having passed the river, (which, like the town, is called Wiazma,) established themselves in obscurity and comparative safety upon the left bank. The day had been disastrous to the French arms, though their honour remained unsullied. They had lost about four thousand men, their regiments were mouldered down to battalions to companies, their companies to weak picquets.

All tacticians agree, that, if Koutousoff had



reinforced Miloradowitch, as warmly urged by Sir Robert Wilson, or if he had forced the town of Wiazma, which his numbers might have enabled him to do, both the centre and rear divisions of Napoleon's force, and probably the troops under Ney also, must have been inevitably cut off. But the aged general confided in the approach of the Russian winter, and declined to purchase, by the blood of his countrymen, a victory of which he held himself secured by the climate. The French were so far from any place where they could procure either food or shelter; they were so hemmed in, and confined to the desolated high roads, which every column as it passed rendered more impracticable to the rest, that he refused to gain, at the sword's-point, advantages which he deemed himself sure of possessing without effort. Determined, therefore, to avoid a general battle, yet to maintain his advantages over the French by manœuvring, Koutousoff, turning a deaf ear to the remonstrances, and even threats, of those who differed in opinion from him, removed his head-quarters to Krasnoi, leaving to Miloradowitch the duty of beating up the rear of the French on their retreat, by following the course of the high-road, while the Hettman Platoff, flanking the



French march with his Cossacks, took advantage of every opportunity to distress them.

In the meanwhile, the Viceroy received orders from Napoleon to abandon the straight road to Smolensk, which was the route of the corps of Davoust and Ney, and to move northward on Dowkhowtchina and Poreczie, to afford countenance and support to Mareschal Oudinot, now understood to be hard pressed by Wittgenstein, who, as we shall presently see, had regained the superiority in the north of Russia. The Viceroy, in obedience to this order, began his march on the new-route which was enjoined him, by marching himself upon Zasselie, closely pursued, watched, and harassed by his usual Scythian attendants. He was compelled to leave behind him sixty-four pieces of cannon; and these, with three thousand stragglers, fell into the prompt grasp of the pursuers.

A large cloud of Cossacks, with Platoff at their head, accompanied the movements of the Viceroy and his Italian army. Whoever strayed from the column was inevitably their prey. Eugene passed a night at Zasselie, without having as yet encountered any great misfortune. But in advancing from thence to Dowkhowtchina, the French had to cross the Wop, a river swell-



ed by rains, while the passage to the ford was steep and frozen. Here the Viceroy passed over his infantry with great difficulty, but was obliged to abandon twenty-three pieces of cannon and all his baggage to the Cossacks. The unhappy Italians, wetted from head to foot, were compelled to pass a miserable night in bivouac upon the other side; and many expired there, whose thoughts, when perishing so miserably, must have been on their own mild climate and delicious country. Next day, the shivering, half-naked, and persecuted column reached Dowkhowtchina, where they expected some relief; but their first welcome was from a fresh swarm of Cossacks, which rushed out from the gates with cannon. These were the advanced corps of the troops which had occupied Moscow, and were now pressing westward where their services were more necessary.

Notwithstanding their opposition, Prince Eugene forced his way into the place with much gallantry, and took up quarters for the night. But having lost his baggage, the greater part of his artillery and ammunition, besides the utter destruction of his cavalry, he saw no prospect of being able to march forward to Witepsk to support Oudinot, nor was he in a condition to



have afforded him assistance, even if he had been in communication. In this situation of distress, the Viceroy determined to rejoin the Grand Army, and for that purpose marched upon Wloderowa, and from thence to Smolensk, where, harassed by the Cossacks, he arrived in a miserable condition upon the 13th of November, having fallen in with Mareschal Ney upon his march, as we shall afterwards mention.

The Emperor, in the meantime, had halted at Stakawo during the 3d and 4th November. On the 5th he slept at Dorogobuje.

On the 6th November commenced that terrible Russian winter, of which the French had not yet experienced the terrors, although the weather had been cold, frosty, and threatening. No sun was visible, and the dense and murky fog which hung on the marching column, was changed into a heavy fall of snow in large broad flakes, which at once chilled and blinded the soldiers. The march, however, stumbled forward, the men struggling, and at last sinking, in the holes and ravines which were concealed from them by the new and disguised appearance of the face of nature. Those who yet retained discipline and their ranks, stood some chance of receiving assistance; but amid the



mass of the stragglers, men's hearts, intent upon self-preservation, became hardened and closed against every feeling of sympathy and compassion, the sentiments of which are sometimes excluded by the selfishness of prosperity, but are almost always destroyed by the egotism of general and overwhelming misfortune. A stormy wind also began to arise, and whirl the snow from the earth, as well as that from the heavens, into dizzy eddies around the soldiers' heads. There were many hurled to the earth in this manner, where the same snows, furnished them with an instant grave, under which they were concealed until the next summer came, and displayed their ghastly remains in the open air. A great number of slight hillocks on each side of the road, intimated, in the meanwhile, the fate of these unfortunate men.

There was only the word Smolensk, which, echoed from man to man, served as a talisman to keep up the spirits of the soldiers. The troops had been taught to repeat that name, as indicating the place where they were once more to be welcomed to plenty and repose. It was counted upon as a depot of stores for the army, especially of such supplies as they had outstripped by their forced marches, first on Wil-



na, and afterwards on Moscow. They were now falling back, as was hoped and trusted, upon these resources, and continued their march with tolerable spirit, which even the snow-storm could not entirely depress. They reckoned also upon a reinforcement of 30,000 men under Victor, who were waiting their arrival at Smolensk; but a concourse of evil tidings had made the services of that division necessary elsewhere.

On the same fatal 6th of November, Buona-  
parte received intelligence of two events, both of deep import, and which corresponded but too well with the storms around him. The one was the singular conspiracy of Mallet, so remarkable for its temporary success, and its equally sudden discomfiture. This carried his mind to Paris, with the conviction that all could not be well with an empire where such an explosion could so nearly attain success. On the other hand, his thoughts were recalled to his present situation by the unpleasing intelligence that Wittgenstein had assumed the offensive, beaten St Cyr, taken Polotsk and Witepsk, and re-occupied the whole line of the Dwina. Here was an unexpected obstacle to his retreat, which he endeavoured to remove by ordering Victor to move



from Smolensk with the division just mentioned, and instantly to drive Wittgenstein behind the Dwina; — not perhaps considering with sufficient accuracy whether the force which his marshal commanded was equal to the task.

Similar bad news came from other quarters. Four demi-brigades of recruits from France had arrived at Smolensk. Baraguay d'Hilliers, their general, had, by command from Buonaparte, sent forward these troops towards Ellnia, intimating at the time that they should clear the road towards Kalouga, by which last town he then expected the Emperor to approach Smolensk. As Napoleon was excluded from the Kalouga road, these troops, as no longer useful at Ellnia, ought to have been drawn back on Smolensk; but Baraguay d'Hilliers had no certain information of this change of route. The consequence was, that the celebrated Russian partizans, Orloff-Denizoff, Davidoff, Seslavin, and others, surprised these raw troops in their cantonments, and made them all prisoners, to the number of better than two thousand men. Other detachments of the French about the same time fell into the hands of the Russians.



At length the longed-for Smolensk was visible. At the sight of its strong walls and lofty towers, the whole stragglers of the army, which now included treble the number of those who kept their ranks, rushed headlong to the place. But instead of giving them ready admission, their countrymen in the town shut the gates against them with horror; for their confused and irregular state, their wild, dirty, and unshaved appearance, their impatient cries for entrance, — above all, their emaciated forms, and starved, yet ferocious aspects, — made them to be regarded rather as banditti than soldiers. At length, the Imperial Guards arrived and were admitted; the miscellaneous crowd rushed in after them. To the Guards, and some few others who had kept order, rations were regularly delivered; but the mass of stragglers, being unable to give any account of themselves or their regiments, or to bring with them a responsible officer, died, many of them, while they besieged in vain the doors of the magazines. Such was the promised distribution of food — the promised quarters were nowhere to be found. Smolensk, as is already recorded, had been burnt by the Russians, and no other covering was to be had than was afforded by miserable sheds reared against such blackened walls as



remained yet standing. But even this was shelter and repose, compared to the exposed bivouac on wreaths of snow; and as the straggling soldiers were compelled by hunger to unite themselves once more with their regiments, they at length obtained their share in the regular distribution of rations, and an approach towards order and discipline began to prevail in the headmost division of the Grand Army of France.

The central part of the army, under Davoust, who had relinquished the rear-guard to Ney, continued to advance from Wiazma to Dorogobuje; but at this point his distress became extreme, from the combined influence of the storm, the enemy, and the disheartened condition of men driven from their standards by want of food, searching for it in vain, and afterwards unable from weakness to resume their ranks. Many fell into the hands of the incensed peasants, by whom they were either killed, or stripped naked and driven back to the high road.

The rear-guard, under Ney, suffered yet more than these. Every house had been burnt before their arrival, and their sufferings from the enemy were the severer, that they were the last French



whom they had to work their revenge upon. Yet Ney continued to evince a degree of personal firmness and resolution which has been rarely witnessed. At the passage of the Dnieper, he was attacked by the enemy, and all was nearly lost in one general confusion, when the Mareschal, seizing a musket to encourage the few men who could be brought to act, succeeded, against all the hopes of the Russians, and equally against the despairing calculations of the French, in bringing over a part of his rear-guard. But he lost on this fatal spot a great part of his artillery, and a great number of his soldiers. We can give only one unvarying sketch of Ney's dreadful retreat. On every point he was attacked by the same wasting, wearying warfare, and every cessation from fighting was necessarily employed in pushing forward towards Smolensk, which he was approaching on the 13th of November, when suddenly the hills to his left were covered with a disorderly mob of fugitives, whom a band of Cossacks were pursuing and slaughtering at pleasure. Having succeeded in dispersing the Cossacks, the next apparition was that of the army of Italy, to which the flying stragglers belonged. This corps d'armée was on its return, as the reader is aware, from Dogohowtchina towards Smolensk, and was as



usual severely pushed at every step by the Cossacks. The passage of the Vop had stripped the soldiers of baggage, provisions such as they had, and artillery and cavalry. They kept their march, however, with sufficient regularity. It was only the stragglers whom the Cossacks chased before them, and wounded, took, and slew at pleasure.

These wretched fugitives no sooner saw Ney's army, than they flew to shelter themselves under its protection, and by doing so communicated their own terror to the Mareschal's ranks. All, both stragglers and soldiers, began to hurry towards the Dnieper, over which was a bridge, which their numbers soon choked up. Great loss was sustained, until Eugene and the indefatigable Ney again presented a defensive front, and repelled the assailants, who had again gathered around them. They were so near Smolensk, that Napoleon could send them refreshments and succour during the action. The Viceroy and Ney at length extricated themselves from their persecutors, and entered Smolensk, where Davoust had before found refuge. Napoleon allowed his army, which was now entirely collected, five days to consume such supplies as were to be found in the place, and to prepare for the ter-



rors of a farther retreat. But though such a delay was indispensable, the evil news which continued to arrive from every quarter, positively prohibited his prolonging this period of repose.

It is now necessary to trace more particularly the incidents which had taken place on the extreme flanks of Napoleon's line of advance, on both of which, as we have already intimated, the Russians, powerfully reinforced, had assumed the offensive, with the apparent purpose of forming a communication with each other, and acting in conjunction, to intercept the retreat of the Grand Army.

Upon the 18th of August, St Cyr having beaten Wittgenstein, and taken Polotsk, the war had languished in that quarter. The French army lay in an entrenched camp, well secured with barracks for shelter, and fortifications for defence. But in the partizan war which they carried on for two months, St Cyr's army sustained great loss, while that of Wittgenstein was more than doubled by the arrival of recruits. Finally, General Steingel, with two divisions of the Russian army from Finland, amounting to 15,000, landed at Riga, and after some ineffi-



cient movements against Macdonald, marched to the support of Wittgenstein. The Russian general, thus reinforced, began to act on the offensive with great vigour. On the 17th of October, the French outposts were driven into their entrenched camp at Polotsk. On the 18th, the camp itself was furiously attacked, and the redoubts by which it was protected were taken and retaken several times. The French remained in possession of them, but St Cyr was wounded, and his situation became very precarious. In fact, the next day, 19th October, the attack was renewed by Wittgenstein on the right bank of the Dwina, while Steingel, advancing up the opposite bank, threatened to occupy Polotsk and its bridge, and thus to enclose St Cyr in the entrenched camp.

Fortunately for the French general, night and a thick mist enabled him to cross the river to the left bank, and thus to effect a retreat, which Steingel was unable to prevent. But besides the disasters of the loss of the camp, and of the important place of Polotsk, which the Russians occupied on the 20th October, discord broke out between the Bavarian General Wrede and St Cyr. When the latter was wounded, the command naturally devolved in course upon the



Bavarian; but the other French generals refused to submit to this substitution, and St Cyr was obliged, in spite of his wounds, to continue to act as commander-in-chief. Wrede, in the meanwhile, assumed an independenece of movement quite unusual in an auxiliary general, who was acting with a French Mareschal; and, separating altogether from St Cyr, fell back upon Vileika, near Wilna, and withdrew himself from action entiely.

The French division must have been cut off, had not Victor, who was then lying at Smolensk with a covering army of twenty-five thousand men, received, as lately mentioned Napoleon's orders, dispatched on the 6th November, to advance and reinforce St Cyr, who thus became once more superior to Wittgenstein. Victor was under orders, however, to run no unnecessary risk, but to keep as far as possible on the defensive; because it was to this army, and that under Schwarzenberg, that Napoleon in a great measure trusted to clear the way for his retreat, and prevent his being intercepted ere he gained the Polish frontiers. But when Wittgenstein, even in the presence of Victor, took Witepsk, and began to establish himself on the Dwina, Napoleon caused Oudinot, as a more enter-



prising soldier, to replace the Duke of Belluno; and ordered Eugene to move from Viazma to Dogohowtchina, for the purpose of reinforcing that army. Eugenes march, as we have formerly shown, was rendered useless, by his misfortune at crossing the river Wop; and he was compelled to move towards Smolensk, where he arrived in a most dilapidated condition.

In the meantime, Wittgenstein received reinforcements, and not only kept Oudinot in complete check, but gradually advanced towards Borizoff, and threatened at that town, which lay directly in the course of Napoleon's retreat, to form a junction with the army of the Danube, which was marching northward with the same purpose of co-operation, and to the movements of which we have now to direct the reader's attention.

It has been mentioned, that General Tormasoff had, on the 12th of August, been defeated at Gorodeczno by the Austrians under Schwarzenberg, and the French under Regnier, and that the Russians had fallen back beyond the Styr. Schwarzenberg, satisfied with this advantage, showed no vehement desire to complete the disaster of his enemy. The French go nigh to bring



an accusation against him of treachery, which we do not believe. But his heart was not in the war. He was conscious, that the success of Alexander would improve the condition of Austria, as well as of Europe in general, and he fought no harder than was absolutely necessary to sustain the part of a general of an auxiliary army, who felt by no means disposed to assume the character of a principal combatant.

While Tormasoff and the Austrians watched each other upon the Styr, two smaller corps of Russians and Poles were making demonstrations in the same country. Prince Bagration, upon retreating from the banks of the Dwina, had not altogether deprived that neighbourhood of Russian troops. At Bobruisk he had left a considerable garrison, which had been blockaded first by the French cavalry under Latour Maubourg, and afterwards, when Maubourg was summoned to join Napoleon, by the Polish General Dombrowski. The garrison was supported by a Russian corps under General Ertell. It was an instance of Napoleon's extreme unwillingness to credit anything that contradicted his wishes, that he persisted in believing, or desiring to have it believed, that the Russians on this point, which commanded still an access from Russia to



Poland, were inferior to the Poles, whom he had opposed to them; and while Dombrowski was acting against Ertell, he overwhelmed the embarrassed general with repeated orders to attack and destroy the enemy, before whom he could scarce maintain his ground.

The armies were thus occupied, when Admiral Tchitchagoff, with fifty thousand Russians, whom the peace with the Turks permitted to leave Moldavia, advanced upon Volhynia with the purpose of co-operating with Tormasoff and Ertell; and, finally, of acting in combination with Wittgenstein, for intercepting Buonaparte's retreat.

On the 14th September, this important junction betwixt the armies of Tormasoff and Tchitchagoff was effected; and the Russian army, increased to 60,000 men, became superior to all the force, whether of French, Austrians, or Poles, which could be opposed to them. They crossed the Styr, and moved forward on the Duchy of Warsaw, while Schwartzenberg, not without loss, retreated to the banks of the Bug. His pursuers might have pressed on him still closer, but for the arrival of Prince Czernicheff, the aide-de-camp of the Emperor, who, escorted



by a body of chosen Cossacks, had executed a perilous march, in order to bring fresh orders to Tormasoff and Dchitchagoff. The former was directed to repair to the grand army, to occupy the situation formerly held by Prince Bagration, while the command of the united Volhynian army was devolved upon Admiral Tchitchagoff, who, to judge by subsequent events, does not seem to have been, on great emergencies, very well fitted for so important a trust.

Prince Czernicheff then set out with his band of Scythians, to carry to the army of Wittgenstein tidings of the purposes and movements of that of Moldavia. The direct course between the Russian armies was held by the Franco-Austrian army. To escape this obstacle, Czernicheff took his course westwards, and, penetrating deep into Poland, made so long a circuit, as completely to turn the whole army of Schwartzenberg. Marching with extraordinary dispatch through the wildest and most secret paths, he traversed the interior of Poland, avoiding at once the unfriendly population and the numerous detachments of the enemy, and sustaining his cavalry, horses and men, in a way in which none but Cossacks, and Cossacks horses, could have supported existence. We have good evi-



dence, that this flying party, on one occasion, travelled nearly one hundred English miles in twenty-four hours.

This extraordinary expedition was marked by a peculiar and pleasing circumstance. The reader must recollect the capture of the German General Winzengerode before the Kremlin, and the ungenerous manner in which Buonaparte expressed himself to that officer. Winzengerode, with another Russian general, were dispatched, under a suitable guard, from Moscow to Wilna, in order to their being sent from thence to Paris, where the presence of two captives of such distinction might somewhat gild the gloomy news which the Emperor was under the necessity of transmitting from Russia. When Winzengerode was prosecuting his melancholy and involuntary journey, far advanced into Poland, and out of all hope either of relief or escape, he saw by the side of a wood a figure, which retreated so suddenly as hardly gave even his experienced eye time to recognise a Cossack's cap and lance. A ray of hope was awakened, which was changed into certainty, as a band of Cossacks, bursting from the wood, overcame the guard, and delivered the prisoners. Czernicheff proceeded successfully on his expedition, embel-



lished by this agreeable incident, and, moving eastward with the same speed, sagacity, and successful enterprise, joined Wittgenstein's army, then lying between Witepsk and Tchakniki, with communications from the Moldavian army, and directions how Wittgenstein was to co-operate with them in the intended plan of cutting off Napoleon's return to Poland.

In virtue of the orders which he had received, Tchitchagoff advanced upon Schwartzenberg, from whom Napoleon might have first expected the service of a covering army, so soon as his broken and diminished troops should approach Poland. But when Tchitchagoff appeared in force, this Franco-Austrian, or rather Austro-Saxon army, was, after some skirmishing, compelled to retire behind the Bug. The Admiral left General Sacken, a brave and active officer, to observe Schwartzencerg and Regnier, and keep them at least in check, whilst he himself retrograded towards the Beresina, where he expected to be able to intercept Buonaparte.

Tchitchagoff succeeded, on the 14th November, in occupying Minsk; a most essential conquest at the moment, for it contained a very large proportion of those stores which had been des-



tined to relieve the Grand Army or rather its remains, so soon as they should approach Poland. This success was followed by another equally important. Count Lambert, one of Tchitchagoff's generals, marched against Barizoff, situated on the Beresina, at the very point where it was probable that Napoleon would be desirous to effect a passage. The valiant Polish General Dombrowski hastened to defend a place, in the loss of which the Emperor's safety must stand particularly compromised. The battle began about day-break on the 21st November, and, after severe fighting, Lambert obtained possession of Borizoff, after a victory, in which Dombrowski lost eight cannon and 2500 prisoners. The Admiral Tchitchagoff removed his head-quarters thither, as directed by the combined plan for farther operations.

While Thitchagoff marched eastward to his place of destination on the Beresina, Sacken, whom he had left in Volhynia, sensible of the importance of the service destined for the Admiral, made every exertion to draw the whole attention of Schwartzenberg and Regnier upon himself. In this daring and generous scheme he completely succeeded. As the forces of the Austrian and the French generals were sepa-



rated from each other, Sacken marched against Regnier, and not only surprised, but nearly made him prisoner. Nothing could have saved Regnier from destruction, except the alertness with which Schwartzenberg came to his assistance. The Austrian, with strong reinforcements, arrived nearly in the moment when his presence must have annihilated Sacken, who, not aware of the Austrians being so near, had, on the 15th November, engaged in a serious action with Regnier near Wolkowitz. The Russian suffered considerable loss, and effected a retreat with difficulty. He concentrated his army, however, and continued his retreat from point to point upon the position of Brzest, from which he had commenced his advance. In this manner, Sacken withdrew the attention of Schwartzenberg and the Austro-Saxon army to the banks of the Bug, at a moment when it ought to have been rivetted on the decisive scenes which were about to take place on those of the Beresina.

The French writers complain of the Austrian general on this occasion. They cannot deny that Schwartzenberg was active and victorious; but they complain that his activity exerted it-



self in a quarter which could not greatly affect the issue of the campaign. Some tacticians account for this, by supposing that his secret instructions, given when the Emperor of Austria could not foresee that the personal safety of his son-in-law would be implicated, prohibited Schwartzenberg to extend his military operations beyond Volhynia and Lithuania.

From these details, it appears that Fortune was bending her blackest and most ominous frowns on the favourite of so many years. Napoleon was quartered, with the wretched relics of his grand army, amid the ruins of the burnt town of Smolensk, in which he could not remain, although his means of escape appeared almost utterly desperate. The grand army of the Russians waited on his flank to assault his columns the instant they were in motion; and should he escape a pursuing enemy, all the Polish towns in the front, where supplies had been provided for his relief, had been taken, and the two large armies of Tchitchagoff and Wittgenstein lay in position on the Beresina to intercept him. Hemmed in betwixt pursuers, and those who, in sportsman's phrase, were stationed to head him back, destitute of cavalry



to oppose the nations of Cossacks which infested every motion, and having but little artillery to oppose to that of the Russians, all probability of escape seemed removed to an immeasurable distance.

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## CHAPTER LXXIX.

*Napoleon divides his Army into four Corps, which leave Smolensk on their retreat towards Poland. — Cautious proceedings of Koutousoff. — The Viceroy's division is attacked by Miloradovitch, and effects a junction with Napoleon at Krasnoi, after severe loss. — Koutousoff attacks the French at Krasnoi, but only by a distant cannonade. — The division under Davoust is reunited to Napoleon, but in a miserable state. — Napoleon marches to Liady, and Mortier and Davoust are attacked, and suffer heavy loss in killed, wounded, prisoners, and artillery. — Details of the retreat of Ney. — He crosses the Losmina, with great loss of men and baggage, and joins Napoleon at Oreza, with his division reduced to 1500 men. — The whole Grand Army is now reduced to 12,000 effective men, besides 30,000 stragglers. — Dreadful distress and difficulties of Bu-*



*naparte and his Army. — Singular scene betwixt Napoleon, and Duroc and Daru. — Napoleon moves towards Borizoff, and falls in with the corps of Victor and Oudinot. — Koutousoff halts at Kopyn, without attacking Buonaparte. — Napoleon crosses the Beresina at Studzianka. — Partouneaux's division cut off by Wittgenstein. — Severe fighting on both sides of the river. — Dreadful losses of the French in crossing it. — According to the Russian official account, 36,000 bodies were found in the Beresina after the thaw.*

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COOPED up, as we have said, in the ruins of Smolensk, and the slender provision of food and supplies which that place offered to his army almost entirely exhausted, Napoleon had now seriously to consider in what direction he should make an effort to escape. As he had heard of the loss of Witepsk, by which town he had advanced, and understood that Wittgenstein was in possession of the line of the Dwina, he naturally determined to take the road to Wilna, by Krasnoi, Borizoff, and Minsk. The two latter towns were stored with the provisions which he



so much wanted; and, ignorant as yet of what had happened on the south of Lithuania, he might expect to find the banks of the Beresina in possession of the Austria-Saxon army under Schwartzenberg.

For this effort he proceeded, as well as circumstances would admit, to reorganize his army. It was reduced to about 40,000 men, with a disproportioned train of baggage and of artillery, although much of the former, and three hundred and fifty cannon, had already been left behind. This force the Emperor divided into four corps, which were to leave Smolensk, placing a day's interval betwixt the march of each. He himself led the van, with 6000 of his Guard, and about as many soldiers, the relics of different corps, amalgamated into battalions as well as circumstances would permit. The Emperor's division left Smolensk on the evening of the 13th and morning of the 14th November.

The division of the viceroy Eugene, consisting of about the same number as that of Napoleon, but inferior in quality, as comprehending none of the Imperial Guard, could not be collected till late on the 15th November, when the wearied wretches were once more put into march, by



promises of a safe arrival in that Lithuania, which so few of them were ever to see again.

On the 16th, Davoust, after some high words with Ney, who would have hurried his departure, set out with another fourth part of the Grand Army, approaching to, or exceeding, 10,000 men in number.

Ney remained till the 17th of November. As he had once more the perilous task of covering the retreat, which duty he had performed so admirably betwixt Wiazma and Smolensk, his division was fortified with about 4000 of the Imperial Guard, to whom, as better fed than the other troops, besides their high character as veterans, more could be trusted, even in the most desperate circumstances. Ere the French left the town, they obeyed the strict commands of the Emperor, in blowing up the towers with which Smolensk was surrounded, that it might not again, as Napoleon expressed himself, form an obstacle to a French army. Such was the language of this extraordinary man, as if affecting to provide for re-entering into Russia, at a time when it was the only question whether he himself, or any individual of his army, should ever be able to leave the fatal country. — We must next attend to the motions of the Russians.



The general voice of the Russian army had demanded Prince Golitcheff Koutousoff, as a chief who would put an end to Barclay de Tolly's system of retreat, and oppose the invaders in a pitched battle. He had done so at Borodino, but it was his last effort of the kind. His character was naturally the reverse of enterprising. Age had increased his disposition to extreme prudence, and the success which attended his procrastinating and cautious measures, while stationed at Taroutino, in the neighbourhood of Moscow, had rivetted him to his own system, of risking as little as possible. It was in vain pointed out to him, that the Russian troops were in high condition, and that against an enemy so utterly broken and dispirited as the French then were, everything might be trusted to those brave soldiers, who had not shrunk from an equal conflict with the same troops when in their vigour; and who, if they were worsted, had left the enemy very little to boast of, having insulted his camp, and occupied the field of battle, even on the very night of his victory. Could Suwarrow have been recalled from the dead, or even the noble Bagration, (the god of the army, as his name signifies in Russian); or had Barclay de Tolly, Bennigsen, or Miloradovitch, been permitted to act when



the moment of action approached, it seems probable that Napoleon would have revisited the Kremlin, not as a conqueror but as a prisoner. But Koutousoff, trusting to the climate of Russia, was contended to let the French army decay under its influence. He had determined not to encounter the slightest risk, but to glean up the wreck of the elements, rather than anticipate their work by the sword. His general plan was to maintain himself on the flank of Napoleon's army, and from time to time to attack them by his vanguard, but by no means to enter into a general action. He surrounded their corps with Cossacks, who brought with them light field-guns mounted on sledges, which did infinite damage on points where the heavy French guns could not be easily pointed, so as to reply to them. This system may be traced in the preceding pages, and still more in those which are about to follow. It has been applauded by many competent judges, as gaining everything without putting anything in hazard; but it is ridiculed by others, and especially by the French, who acknowledge themselves obliged to the tardiness of Koutousoff, and the blunders of the Admiral Tchitchagoff, for the escape of the poor remnant of the Grand Army which was preserved, and especially for the personal safety of



the Emperor himself. With these explanations we resume our melancholy and momentous story.

Without any purpose of departing from his maxims of caution, Koutousoff commenced the attack on the retreating army by a movement which appeared to indicate a more vigorous plan of procedure. He put his army in motion towards Krasnoi, upon a parallel line with that of Buonaparte, moving on the left flank of the French, so as to place Napoleon's line of advance at his mercy, whenever he should think proper to assail it. At the same time, he detached several large bodies to operate on the march of the enemy's column.

Miloradovitch, with a large vanguard, pushed forward upon the high road leading from Smolensk to Krasnoi. Buonaparte had already reached the latter point, at the head of his division, but Eugene, who brought up the rear of the column, was effectually cut off. They were summoned to lay down their arms, but the Viceroy manfully rejected the proposal. Immediately, each surrounding hill poured forth, like a volcano, a torrent of fire upon them. The French and Italians maintained their ground with unavailing



bravery. Numbers were killed, others made prisoners, and the division almost entirely destroyed.

Still the Viceroy made his defence good, till night, the friend of the overmatched, approached to protect him; when, at the head of his division, diminished to one half, he quitted the high road, leaving his fires burning to mislead the enemy, and, gaining the open fields, accomplished, with great loss and ineffable fatigue, his junction with Napoleon at Krasnoi, which he reached by a circuitous route. The challenge of a sentinel during this delicate manœuvre might have been utter destruction — and in fact they did encounter such a challenge. They were saved from the consequences by a ready-witted Pole, who, answering the sentinel in Russian, imposed silence on him, pretending that they were the corps of Owaroff, employed upon a secret expedition.

At length, upon the next morning, (17th November,) Eugene reached the head-quarters of his father-in-law, who had been very anxious on his account. When the diminished division of Eugene was united to that of the Emperor, they did not exceed 15,000 men in total amount. Yet on being joined by Eugene, the active genius of



Napoleon, in these most disadvantageous circumstances, displayed its ascendancy. He had caused General Roguet, with a detachment of the Young Guard, in the night between the 15th and 16th, to beat up the quarters of a Russian detachment, which approached his own too closely; and having thus taught the hunters to respect the lair of the lion, he embraced the audacious resolution of remaining at Krasnoi in defiance of the Russian army, till the detachments of Davoust and Ney should again join him. Whatever had been his reasons for separating from these divisions, he now saw the necessity of once more uniting his forces.

Even the cold and cautious spirit of Koutousoff could not miss the opportunity occasioned by this halt of 15,000 men, in the face of perhaps three times their number. But neither the persuasions of his own officers, nor the reproaches of Sir Robert Wilson, the English commissioner, could prevail on the old general to attack with the vivacity which the occasion demanded. He would only consent to wage a distant engagement with artillery. At day-break on the 17th, Eugene, whose forces the preceding battle had altogether disabled, was directed to take the advance towards Liady, the next miserable stage of



the French army, while Buonaparte drew his sword, and saying he had already played the Emperor, and must now once more be the general, led in person his 6000 guards, attended by Mortier at the head of 5000 soldiers more, to meet as great odds as it should please Koutousoff to dispatch against him. \*) In the sort of battle which followed, the Russians acted with great caution. The name of Napoleon almost

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\*) Colonel Boutourlin praises the address of Koutousoff, who, he says, managed with such skill as always to present a superior force to that which the French had upon the field of battle, although his army was on the whole inferior to that of Napoleon. Without admitting the exactness of the last statement, which there is considerable cause to dispute, little merit can be assumed for the Russian general's dexterity in obtaining a numerical superiority at Wiazma, Krasnoi, and elsewhere, when it is considered that Napoleon himself had divided his army into four columns, and placed one day's march betwixt each. The Russian had, therefore, only one column of ten or twelve thousand men to deal with at once.



alone protected his army. The French suffered, indeed, from the fire of 100 pieces of artillery, and from charges of cavalry, which they had no means of answering or repelling; but, though gaps were made in their line, and some of their squares were forced by the cavalry, yet neither success nor repulse could induce Koutousoff to hazard a serious attack upon Napoleon, for the purpose of altogether destroying the invader and his army. Even Boutourlin, a friendly critic, where the reputation of the old Russian general is concerned, regrets he had not taken the bold course of placing his army across the direct line of Buonaparte's retreat, when the French, overcome at once by physical suffering and moral depression, must, even supposing them equal in numbers, have been extremely inferior to their opponents. Upon the whole, Koutousoff seems to have acted towards Napoleon and the Grand Army, as the Greenland fishers do to the whale, whom they are careful not to approach in his dying agonies, when pain, fury, and a sense of revenge, render the last struggles of the leviathan peculiarly dangerous.

The battle, or cannonade of Krasnoi, was concluded by the appearance of Davoust and his column, surrounded and followed by a large body



of Cossacks, from whom he endeavoured to extricate himself by a precipitate march. When they came in sight of Krasnoi, most of the soldiers, who had been horribly harassed since they left Smolensk, broke their ranks, and hurried across the fields to escape the Russians, and gain the cover of the town, in the streets of which their officers rallied them with difficulty. In this miserable condition was the third corps of the army, according to its latest division, when it was reunited to the main body. Upon inquiring after Ney and the rear-guard, Napoleon had the mortification to learn that Ney was probably still at Smolensk, or, if upon the road, that he must be surrounded with difficulties out of which it was impossible he could extricate himself.

In the meantime, Napoleon learned that the Russians were acting with more vigour, and that Prince Galitzin was about to occupy Krasnoi; and further, that if he did not advance with all dispatch on Liady, he might probably find it in possession of the enemy. Gladly as Napoleon would have kept the field, in order to protect the approach of Ney, he now saw that such perseverance must necessarily expose himself and the remnant of his army to the greatest peril, with-



out, in all human probability, being of use to his Mareschal. Under this conviction, he put himself at the head of the Old Guard, to march on as fast as possible, and secure Liady, and with it the passage of the Dnieper, from which he might otherwise have been excluded. Davoust and Mortier were left to defend Krasnoi, if practicable, till night-fall, and then to follow under cover of the darkness. The retreat of Napoleon seemed to remove the charm, which had chilled the Russians and warmed the French. A very fierce assault was made on the second and third divisions, and Mortier and Ney, having both suffered greatly, made their escape to Liady with much difficulty. The French left on this fatal field forty-five pieces of cannon, upwards of six thousand prisoners, with a great number of slain, and as many wounded, who were necessarily left to the mercy of the Russians. To complete their losses, Ney's division of the army was, by the direction of the other columns upon Liady; left with the whole Russian army betwixt himself and Napoleon. The retreat of that celebrated soldier must next be narrated.

On the 17th of November, Ney, last of the invading army, left Smolensk at the head of seven or eight thousand fighting men, leaving



behind 5000 sick and wounded, and dragging along with them the remaining stragglers whom the cannon of Platoff, who entered the town immediately on Ney's departure, had compelled to resume their march. They advanced without much interruption till they reached the field of battle of Krasnoi, where they saw all the relics of a bloody action, and heaps of dead, from whose dress and appearance they could recognise the different corps in which they had served in Napoleon's army, though there was no one to tell the fate of the survivors. They had not proceeded much farther beyond this fatal spot, when they approached the banks of the Losmina, where all had been prepared at leisure for their reception. Miloradovitch lay here at the head of a great force; and a thick mist, which covered the ground, occasioned Ney's column to advance under the Russian batteries before being aware of the danger.

A single Russian officer appeared, and invited Ney to capitulate. "A Mareschal of France never surrenders," answered that intrepid general. The officer retired, and the Russian batteries opened a fire of grape-shot, at the distance of only two hundred and fifty yards, while at the concussion the mist arose, and showed the devoted



column of French, with a ravine in front manned by their enemies, subjected on every side to a fire of artillery, while the hills were black with the Russian troops placed to support their guns. Far from losing heart in so perilous a situation, the French Guards, with rare intrepidity, forced their way through the ravine of the Losmina, and rushed with the utmost fury on the Russian batteries. They were, however, charged in their turn with the bayonet, and such as had crossed the stream suffered dreadfully. In spite of this failure, Ney persevered in the attempt to cut his passage by main force through this superior body of Russians, who lay opposed to him in front. Again the French advanced upon the cannon, losing whole ranks, which were supplied by their comrades as fast as they fell. The assault was once more unsuccessful, and Ney, seeing that the general fate of his column was no longer doubtful, endeavoured at least to save a part from the wreck. Having selected about four thousand of the best men, he separated himself from the rest, and set forth under shelter of the night, moving to the rear, as if about to return to Smolensk. This, indeed, was the only road open to him, but he did not pursue it long; for as soon as he reached a rivulet, which had the appearance of being one of the feeders of the Dnie-



per, he adopted it for his guide to the banks of that river, which he reached in safety near the village of Syrokovenia. Here he found a single place in the river frozen over, though the ice was so thin that it bent beneath the steps of the soldiers.

Three hours were permitted, to allow stragglers from the column during the night-march to rally at this place, should their good fortune enable them to find it. These three hours Ney spent in profound sleep, lying on the banks of the river, and wrapped up in his cloak. When the stipulated time had elapsed, the passage to the other side began and continued, although the motion of the ice, and the awful sound of its splitting into large cracks, prevented more than one from crossing at once. The waggons, some loaded with sick and wounded, last attempted to pass; but the ice broke with them, and the heavy plunge and stifled moaning, apprised their companions of their fate. The Cossacks, as usual, speedily appeared in the rear, gleaned up some hundreds of prisoners, and took possession of the artillery and baggage.

Ney had thus put the Dnieper betwixt him and the regulars of the Russian army, by a retreat which has few parallels in military history.



But he had not escaped the Cossacks, who were spread abroad over the face of the country, and soon assembled around the remains of his column, with their light artillery and long lances. By these enemies they were several times placed in the utmost jeopardy; nevertheless, at the head of a reduced band of fifteen hundred men, the Mareschal fought his way to Orcza, to which town Napoleon had removed from Liady, having crossed the Dnieper. Ney arrived on the 20th November, and found Eugene, Mortier, and Davoust. The Emperor was two leagues in advance when they met. Napoleon hailed Ney with the undisputed title, the bravest of the brave, and declared he would have given all his treasures to be assured of his existence. His comrades hastened to welcome and to relieve him, and being now in Poland, provisions and accommodation had become more plenty among them.

All Napoleon's Grand Army was now united. But the whole, which had at Smolensk amounted to forty thousand, consisted now of scarcely twelve thousand men who retained the name and discipline of soldiers, so much had want and the sword thinned the ranks of these invincible legions. There were besides, perhaps, thirty thousand stragglers of every description, but these



added little or nothing to the strength of the army; and only served to encumber its numbers, as they were under no discipline, but plundered the country without mercy.

At this dreadful crisis, too, Napoleon had the mortification to learn the fall of Minsk, and the retreat of Schwartzenberg to cover Warsaw, which, of course, left him no hopes of receiving succour from the Austrians. He heard also that Victor and Oudinot had quarrelled in what manner Wittgenstein should be attacked, and had on that account left him unattacked on any point. That general was therefore at freedom to threaten the left of the Grand Army, should it remain long on the Dnieper; while Koutousoff might resume, at his pleasure, his old station on Napoleon's left, and Tchitchagoff might occupy the Beresina in his front. In the bitterness of his heart the Emperor exclaimed, "Thus it befalls, when we commit faults upon faults."

Minsk being out of the question, Napoleon's next point of direction was Borizoff. Here there was, over the Beresina, a bridge of three hundred fathoms in length, the possession of which appeared essential to his final escape from Russia. But while Napoleon was considering what should be his next movement, after crossing the Beresina



at Borizoff, he was once more surprised with the additional evil tidings, that this town also, with the bridge so necessary to him, was lost; that Borizoff was taken, as formerly mentioned, and Dombrowski defeated under its walls.

“Is it then written,” he said, looking upwards, and striking the earth with his cane, “Is it written that we shall commit nothing but errors!”

About the same gloomy period, Segur relates the following anecdote: — Napoleon had stretched himself on a couch, and apparently slumbered, while his faithful servants, Duroc and Daru, sitting in his apartment, talked over their critical situation. In their whispered conversation, the words, “prisoner of state,” reached the sleepless ear of Napoleon.

“How!” said he, raising himself, “do you think they would dare?”

In answer, Daru mentioned the phrase, well known to the Emperor, of state policy, as a thing independent of public law or of morality.

“But France,” said the Emperor, to whom state policy sounded at present less pleasantly than when it was appealed to for deciding some



great movement of his own, — «what will France say?»

«Who can answer that question, Sire?» continued Duroc; but added, «it was his warmest wish that the Emperor, at least, could reach France, were it through the air, if earth were stopped against his passage.»

«Then I am in your way, I suppose?» said the Emperor.

The reply was affirmative.

«And you,» continued the Emperor, with an affectation of treating the matter lightly, «have no wish to become a prisoner of state?»

«To be a prisoner of war is sufficient for me,» said Daru.

Napoleon was silent for a time; then asked if the reports of his ministers were burnt.

«Not yet,» was the reply.

«Then let them be destroyed,» he continued, «for it must be confessed we are in a most lamentable condition.»

This was the strongest sign he had yet given, of Napoleon's deep feeling of the situation to which he had reduced himself. In studying the



map, to discover the fittest place to pass the Beresina, he approached his finger to the country of the Cossacks, and was heard to murmur, "Ah, Charles XII.; Pultawa." But these were only the momentary ejaculations dictated by a sense of his condition; all his resolutions were calmly and firmly taken, with a sense of what was due to himself and to his followers.

It was finally determined, that, in despite of Tchitchagoff and his army, which occupied the left bank, the passage of the Beresina should be attempted, at a place above Borizoff called Studzianka, where the stream was only fifty-five fathoms across, and six feet deep. There were heights, it is true, on the opposite bank, surrounding a piece of meadow ground, and these the adventurers must look to find strongly occupied; so that those who adventured on the passage must expect to land in that marshy meadow, under a heavy fire from that position. Lastly, this perilous attempt must, in all probability, be made in the very teeth of the Moldavian army. With Napoleon's ten or twelve thousand fighting men, and twice or three times the number of disorderly stragglers, the attempt to force such a passage would have been utter insanity. But the star of Napoleon had not yet set.



The first dawn of reviving fortune was marked by the success of Victor and Oudinot. They were advancing with the hope of saving Borizoff, when they received intelligence that Dombrowski was routed by Wittgenstein, and that the fragments of the Polish corps were close at hand, followed by the victorious Russians. Oudinot instantly gathered the scattered Poles under his protection, and moving on to meet the Russian advanced-guard, they drove them back with considerable loss. Wittgenstein, in consequence of this check, found himself obliged to abandon Borizoff, and once more to place the Beresina betwixt himself and the French. But in repassing that river, he took care to destroy the bridge at Borizoff, so that the town, though secured by the French, was no longer useful to them as a place of passage, and the Emperor, when he learned the news, was still compelled to abide by the plan of crossing, as he best could, at Studzianka. The task was rendered more easy, by the prospect of his scattered and broken army being reinforced by the troops of Victor and Oudinot, who were on the same side of the fatal river with himself, and might form an immediate junction with him.

Meantime, as a preparation for the march, the Emperor limited all the officers, even of the



highest rank, to one carriage; and ordered one half of the waggons to be destroyed, that all the horses and draught-oxen might be applied to getting forward the ammunition and artillery. There is reason to think these commands were very imperfectly obeyed. Another order, marking strongly the exigencies of the time, respected such officers as still retained their horses. The cavalry, under Latour Maubourg, had, since leaving Smolensk, been reduced from eighteen hundred to one hundred and fifty. To supply this deficiency, about five hundred officers, all who remained mounted, were formed into a body called the Sacred Squadron, to attend upon the Emperor's person. Grouchy and Sebastiani had the command of this body, in which officers formed the privates, and generals of division served as captains. But it was not long ere fatigue and want of forage, no respecters of rank or condition, dismounted the greater part of the Sacred Squadron.

The army thus in some small degree reorganized, and refreshed by the better quarters and nourishment which they had received since the battle of Krasnoi, now plunged into the immense pine forests which conceal the course of the Beresina, to disguise their adventurous march



the more completely from the enemy. They were moving towards Borizoff, when loud shouts from the forest at first spread confusion among their ranks, under the idea of an unexpected attack; but this fear was soon changed into joy, when they found themselves on the point of uniting with the army of Victor and Oudinot, amounting to fifty thousand men, complete and provided with everything. Yet whatever the joy on the part of the Grand Army, it was at least equalled by the astonishment of their comrades, when they recognised the remains of the innumerable host which had left them in such splendid equipment, and now returned in the guise, and with the gait and manner, of spectres raised from a church-yard. They filed past their happier comrades with squalid countenances, their uniform replaced by women's pelisses, or what various rags each could pick up; their feet bare and bleeding, or protected by bundles of filthy rags instead of shoes. All discipline seemed gone; the officer gave no command, the soldier obeyed none. A sense of common danger led them to keep together and to struggle forward, and mutual fatigue made them take repose by the same fires; but what else they had learned of discipline was practised rather by instinct than by duty, and in many cases was altogether forgotten.



The army of the two Mareschals, however, though scarce recovered from their astonishment, joined the ranks of the Grand Army, and, as if disorder had been infectious, very soon showed a disposition to get rid of that military discipline, which their new associates had flung aside. — Leaving Napoleon on his advance to the river, it is now necessary to notice the motions of the Russians.

The glory and the trophies of the march of the Grand Army had been enough entirely to satisfy Koutousoff. They were indeed sufficient to gorge such a limited ambition as that general might be supposed to possess at his advanced age, when men are usually more bent on saving than on winning. From the 15th to the 19th November, the Russians had obtained possession of 228 guns, had made 26,000 prisoners, of whom three hundred were officers, besides 10,000 men slain in battle, or destroyed by fatigue. Satisfied with such advantages, the cautious veteran proceeded by short journeys to Kopyn, on the Dnieper, without crossing that river, or attempting to second the defence of the Beresina by an attack on the rear of the enemy.

It is true, that the Russian army had sustained great losses; not less, it was said, than 30,000



sick and wounded, were for the present unable to serve, although the greater part of them afterwards recovered. It is no less true, that the Russian soldiers suffered greatly from want of hospitals, being unprovided for a struggle on such an extensive scale as Napoleon's invasion gave rise to. Nor can it be denied that Koutousoff's minute attention to the proper providing of his army with all necessaries was highly laudable. Yet we must still be of opinion, that an object so important as the capture of Buonaparte and the destruction of his army, would have vindicated, even if the soldier himself had been appealed to, two or three forced marches, with the hardships attending them. Such, however, was not Koutousoff's opinion; he halted at Kopyn, and contented himself with dispatching his Cossacks and light troops to annoy Napoleon's rear.

The danger not being pressing on the part of the Grand Army of Russia, Napoleon had only to apprehend the opposition of Tchitchagoff, whose army, about 35,000 men in all, was posted along the Beresina to oppose the passage of Buonaparte wherever it should be attempted. Unfortunately, the Admiral was one of an ordinary description of people, who, having once deter-



mined in their own mind, that an adversary entertains a particular design, proceed to act upon that belief as an absolute certainty, and can rarely be brought to reason on the possibility of his having any other purpose. Thus, taking it for granted that Napoleon's attempt to cross the Beresina would take place *below* Borizoff, Tchitchagoff could not be persuaded that the passage might be as well essayed *above* that town. Napoleon, by various inquiries and reports transmitted through the Jews, who, for money, served as spies on both sides, contrived to strengthen Tchitchagoff in the belief that he was only designing a feint upon Studzianka, in order to withdraw the attention of the Russians from the Upper Beresina. Never was a stratagem more successful.

On the very day when Napoleon prepared for the passage at Studzianka, Tchitchagoff, instead of noticing what was going forward beneath Borizoff, not only marched up the river with all the forces under his own immediate command, but issued orders to the division of Tschaplitz, which amounted to six thousand men, and at present watched the very spot where Napoleon meant to erect his bridges, to leave that position, and follow him in the same direction. These



were the very orders which Buonaparte would have dictated to the Russian leader, if he had had his choice.

When the French arrived at Studzianka, their first business was to prepare two bridges, a work which was attended with much danger and difficulty. They laboured by night, expecting in the morning to be saluted with a cannonade from the Russian detachment under Tschaplitz, which occupied the heights already mentioned, on the opposite bank. The French generals, and particularly Murat, considered the peril as so imminent, that they wished Buonaparte to commit himself to the faith of some Poles who knew the country, and leave the army to their fate; but Napoleon rejected the proposal as unworthy of him. All night the French laboured at the bridges, which were yet but little advanced, and might have been easily demolished by the artillery of the Russians. But what was the joy and surprise of the French to see, with the earliest beams of the morning, that artillery, and those Russians, in full march, retreating from their position! Availing himself of their disappearance, Buonaparte threw across a body of men who swam their horses over the river, with each a voltigeur behind him. Thus a footing



was gained on the other bank of this perilous stream. Great part of Victor's army had moved down the river towards Studzianka, while the last division lay still at Borizoff, of which town that Mareschal had possession. This constituted a rear-guard to protect the army of Napoleon during the critical moment of its passage, from the interruption which might be expected from the corps of Wittgenstein.

During the 26th and 27th, Napoleon pushed troops across the river, those of Oudinot forming the advance; and was soon so secure, that Tschaplitz, discovering his error, and moving back to regain his important position at Studzianka, found the French too strongly posted on the right bank of the Beresina, for his regaining the opportunity which he had lost. He halted, therefore, at Stakhov, and waited for reinforcements and orders. Meanwhile the passage of the Beresina continued, slowly indeed, for the number of stragglers and the quantity of baggage was immense; yet by noon Napoleon and his Guards had crossed the river. Victor, whose division constituted the rear-guard of the Grand Army, had relieved the Imperial Guards in their post on the left bank; and Partouneaux, who formed the rear of the whole army, was moving from



Borizoff, where he had been stationed with the purpose of fixing the enemy's attention upon the spot. No sooner had he left the town than it was again in the hands of the Russians, being instantly occupied by Platoff.

But the indefatigable Wittgenstein was in motion on the left bank, pressing forward as Victor closed up towards Napoleon; and, throwing himself betwixt Studzianka and Borizoff, on a plain called Staroi-Borizoff, he cut off Partouneaux's division from the rest of the French army. That general made a gallant resistance, and attempted to force his way at the sword's point through the troops opposed to him. At length the Hettman Platoff, and the Russian partizan Seslawin, coming up, the French general found himself entirely overpowered, and after a brave resistance laid down his arms. Three generals, with artillery, and, according to the Russian accounts, about 7000 men, fell into the hands of the Russians, — a prize the more valuable, as the prisoners belonged chiefly to the unbroken and unexhausted division of Victor, and comprehended eight hundred fine cavalry in good order.

To improve this advantage, the Russians threw a bridge of pontoons across the Beresina at Bo-



rizoff, and Tchitchagoff and Wittgenstein having communicated, resolved upon a joint attack upon both banks of the river at once. With this purpose, upon the 28th of November, Admiral Tchitchagoff moved to Stakhowa, upon the right bank, to reinforce Tschaplitz, and assault that part of the French army which had crossed the Beresina; and Wittgenstein with Platoff marched towards Studzianka, to destroy the Emperor's rear-guard, which no exertion on the part of Napoleon or his generals had yet been able to get across the river. Thus, the extraordinary good fortune of finding a place of passage, and of being enabled by an uncommon chance to complete his bridges without opposition, was so far from placing Napoleon in safety, that his dangers seemed only to multiply around him. But yet upon his side of the river, now the right bank, his own presence of mind, and the bravery of his soldiers, gave him a decided superiority, and the tardiness, to say the least, of Tchitchagoff's motions, insured his safety.

Tschaplitz, who seems to have been a brave and active officer, commenced the battle by advancing from Stakhowa. But he was worsted by the French, who were superior in numbers, and he received no succours from the Admiral, though



repeatedly demanded. \*) In this manner were the French enabled to force their way towards a village called Brelowau, through deep morasses, and over long bridges or rail-ways, formed of the trunks of pine-trees, where a bold attack might have rendered their advance impossible. The least exertion on the part of Tchitchagoff might have caused these bridges to be burnt; and as combustibles were laid ready for the purpose, it required but, according to Segur's expression, a spark from the pipe of a Cossack, to have set them on fire. The destruction of this rail-way, inclosing the French between the morass and the river, must have rendered the passage of the Beresina entirely useless. But it was not so decreed; and the French, under Oudinot, were enabled to preserve the means of a movement so essential to their safety. Meanwhile the scene on the left bank had become the wildest and most horrible which war can exhibit.

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\*) The conduct of the Admiral was so unaccountable on this occasion, that some attempted to explain it on his naval habits, and to suppose that he was prevented from sending the reinforcements by the wind being contrary.



On the heights of Studzianka, Victor, who commanded the French rear-guard, amounting perhaps to 8000 or 10,000 men, was prepared to cover the retreat over the bridges. The right of this corps d'armée rested on the river; a ravine full of bushes covered their front, but the left wing had no point of support. It remained, according to the military phrase, *in the air*, and was covered by two regiments of cavalry. Behind this defensive line were many thousands of stragglers, mingled with the usual followers of a camp, and with all those individuals who, accompanying, for various reasons, the French from Moscow, had survived the horrors of the march. Women, children, domestics, the aged and the infants, were seen among the wretched mass, and wandered by the side of this fatal river, like the fabled spectres which throng the banks of the infernal Styx, and seek in vain for passage. The want of order, which it was impossible to preserve, the breaking of the bridges, and the time spent in the repair — the fears of the unhappy wretches to trust themselves to the dangerous and crowded passages, had all operated to detain them on the right bank. The baggage, which, in spite of the quantity already lost, of the difficulty of transportation, and of Napoleon's precise orders, amounted still to a very



great number of carts, wains, and the like, and which was now augmented by all that belonged to the troops of Oudinot and Victor, was seen, some filing towards the bridges, and the greater part standing in confusion upon the shore. The artillery itself, such as remained, was in no better state.

Such was the condition of matters at the bridge, when Wittgenstein, warm from his victory over Partouneaux, marching down the left bank of the Beresina, engaged in a fierce combat with the rear-guard under Victor; and the balls of the Russians began to fall among the mingled and disordered mass which we have endeavoured to describe. It was then that the whole body of stragglers and fugitives rushed like distracted beings towards the bridges, every feeling of prudence or humanity swallowed up by the animal instinct of self-preservation. The horrible scene of disorder was augmented by the desperate violence of those, who, determined to make their own way at all risks, threw down and trampled upon whatever came in their road. The weak and helpless either shrunk back from the fray, and sat down to wait their fate at a distance, or, mixing in it, were thrust over the bridges, crushed under carriages, cut down perhaps with



sabres, or trampled to death under the feet of their countrymen. All this while the action continued with fury, and, as if the Heavens meant to match their wrath with that of man, a hurricane arose, and added terrors to a scene which was already of a character so dreadful.

About mid-day the French, still bravely resisting, began to lose ground. The Russians, coming gradually up in strength, succeeded in forcing the ravine, and compelling them to assume a position nearer the bridges. About the same time, the larger bridge, that constructed for artillery and heavy carriages, broke down, and multitudes were forced into the water. The scream of mortal agony, which arose from the despairing multitude, became at this crisis for a moment so universal, that it rose shrilly audible over the noise of the elements and the thunders of war, above the wild whistling of the tempest, and the sustained and redoubled hourras of the Cossacks. The witness from whom we have this information, declares that the sound was in his ears for many weeks. This dreadful scene continued till dark, many being forced into the icy river, some throwing themselves in, betwixt absolute despair, and the faint hope of gaining the opposite bank by swimming, some getting across only to die



of cold and exhaustion. As the obscurity came on, Victor, with the remainder of his troops, which was much reduced, quitted the station he had defended so bravely, and led them in their turn across. All night, the miscellaneous multitude continued to throng across the bridge, under the fire of the Russian artillery, to whom, even in the darkness, the noise which accompanied their march made them a distinct mark. At day-break, the French engineer, General Eblé, finally set fire to the bridge. All that remained on the other side, including many prisoners, and a great quantity of guns and baggage, became the prisoners and the prey of the Russians. The amount of the French loss was never exactly known; but the Russian report, concerning the bodies of the invaders which were collected and burnt as soon as the thaw permitted, states that upwards of 36,000 were found in the Beresina.



















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Bd.: 114

Zwickau 1828

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